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OUR IDOL,

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS,

BY

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MRS. HARRY BECKETT.

NEW YORK :

METROPOLITAN PRINT, HERALD BUILDING, 218 BROADWAY.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ:

JACK BEAMISH, an Artist... ..
NOEL BLAKE, a Composer... ..
BERTIE FFOLLIOTT, Clerk in the 12 to 4 Office....
MAJOR SPOTT WHYTE, of Wrangle's Hussars, in
the Austrian service... ..
SEBASTIAN SMYTHE, a Disciple of Wagner... ..
HORNGOLD, a Sculptor... ..
TEDDY SPROTT, an Art Student... ..
MR. SMYLIE, a Lawyer... ..
WITHERS, Butler at Field Royal... ..
WILLIAMS, Major White's Groom... ..
JENKINS, Lady Blanchmayne's Footman... ..
MADGE HESKETT, Noel's Cousin... ..
LADY BLANCHMAYNE... ..
BABY BLANCHMAYNE... ..
MRS. BUNN, Housekeeper at Field Royal... ..

ACT I.

SCENE: *Painter's Studio; large Window at back; Easel L with unfinished Picture; small Table close by Door L 2 E; Piano; Sofa R by Wall; Busts, Sketches, &c., on Table and Walls; an old carved Chest, on which are a Helmet, a Mandoline, Rapiers, &c., &c.; Vases of Flowers on Piano; Music to take up Curtain.*

A knock at door. Enter Teddy Spro't, timidly, with large bunch of roses.

TEDDY, *looking about.* She is not here, so I can leave them without being found out. *(Puts flowers on table by work basket.)* I wonder if she suspects where they come from? Sometimes I almost hope she does, but then when we meet she holds out her hand so calmly and says "Good morning, Mr. Sprott," so unconsciously that I begin to despair again. I shall never have courage to tell her how much I love her, so I have painted this little portrait of myself *(taking it from breast pocket)* and it shall speak for me. I will just lay it there under the roses, and *(Bus—puls portrait on table).* Oh, Lord, how my heart does beat! *(Hides picture; as he comes down Madge enters with vases of flowers, which she places on piano.)*

MADGE. *(Holding out her hand.)* Ah, good morning, Mr. Sprott?

TEDDY. *(B wing.)* Good morning, Miss Heskett. *(Aside.)* As usual.

MADGE. You are waiting to see Jack, I suppose? He has gone to ask after poor Warrington, who is very ill, but I expect him in every minute. You don't mind my going on with my work, I am rather late this morning! *(Goes on dusting and arranging furniture.)*

TEDDY. O, not at all. *(Aside.)* No, she does not care for me. I wish I had the portrait back. *(Edging towards it.)*

MADGE. You have a holiday to-day, I suppose, Mr. Sprott, as you are out so early?

TEDDY. I—oh, no! Only I just thought I would look in and —

MADGE. But you are losing the best hours of the morning, and it is such a pity. I thought you were determined to be a painter, like Jack? How can you do that unless you work hard? He is never idle.

TEDDY. *(Fumbling with his hat.)* Yes—no, Miss Heskett, and yet he does n't seem to make much progress with his great picture over there.

MADGE. *(Sadly, and pausing to look at picture which hangs unfinished on wall.)* No, poor fellow.

TEDDY. "CleopatraAwaiting the Visit of Octavia," I think he calls it! She seems to have been waiting a long time. The picture is smothered in dust.

MADGE. That is because I am not tall enough to reach up to it, and Jack only laughs at me when I speak of it. You see it takes him all his time to paint portraits—"pot boilers," as he calls them—in order to keep the house, and in the meanwhile his great picture, of which he used to dream so fondly, remains unfinished.

TEDDY. I beg your pardon; I did not mean —

MADGE. *(Smiling.)* I am sure of that. *(Goes on dusting.)* *(Teddy, business of edging towards portrait.)* Here is Jack, I believe. *(Runs and opens door.)*

(Enter Smythe and Horngold.)

SMYTHE. May we come in?

MADGE. Yes, come in; but pray don't make a noise, for Noel is asleep.

SMYTHE. *(Coming down.)* Asleep at this hour! Let's wake him up. *(Going.)*

MADGE. *(Stopping them.)* No; please don't. It always makes him so irritable, I mean so nervous, when he is roused out of his sleep. You know how sensitive he is.

SMYTHE. *(Drily.)* We do. *(Looking at picture on easel.)* By Jove, the picture progresses. How hard the old boy does work!

MADGE. *(Archly.)* Yes, his labor is for the present you know, not for the future.

SMYTHE. Now, Miss Heskett, you are too cruel. I confess I am an idle fellow;

but what is the use of making statues in this degenerate age, when every one is so hideously ugly! Suppose, for instance, that Teddy Sprott there were to order a bust of himself, what could I do with such material? (*All laugh.*)

TEDDY. (*Annoyed.*) Hang it all, Horngold, I —

SMYTHE. And as for me, when I offer my compositions to a brainless public, they turn a deaf ear and say they cannot understand the mission it conveys.

MADGE. But it seems to me that music has no mission, and that so long as it pleases you—

HORNGOLD. Ah! that was all very well in the antiquated days of Mozart and Weber, but we have outgrown such childish notions. Smythe's music does not please anybody.

(*Teddy laughs.*)

SMYTHE. (*Looking at Teddy, who stops suddenly.*) I should hope not, indeed.

HORNGOLD. It paints—describes—

MADGE. What?

SMYTHE. Anything and everything! From the play of the telegraph wires down to the most ordinary action of your life, such as reading the newspaper or opening an umbrella.

MADGE. Dear me!

HORNGOLD. For instance, suppose you want to say to your servant, "Mary Ann, that coffee is too hot!" Sebastian, oblige me by translating that phrase into music, old fellow.

SMYTHE. With pleasure. (*Sings a few bars, ending in a scream.*)

MADGE. And that means, "the coffee is too hot"

SMYTHE. You don't mean to tell me you didn't catch the idea. "Mary Ann," (*sings*) "the coffee" (*sings*). Can't you hear how plainly that expresses coffee? A little wild Oriental phrase with a kind of aroma about it, you know! "Is too hot!" (*screams*) a cry as if you had burnt yourself

MADGE. (*Laughing.*) Wonderful! (*Still working, takes up roses.*)

TEDDY. (*Aside.*) Oh, Lord!

MADGE. What lovely roses! (*Portrait falls. Horngold picks it up.*)

HORNGOLD. Halloo! what have we here? (*All crowding round.*)

TEDDY. Oh, dear! Now he will spoil it all! (*Calls Smythe mysteriously aside.*) I say, can't you get him away? That's my portrait, and—

HORNGOLD. Some new adorer, Miss Heskett?

MADGE. No, indeed. I never saw it before. (*They look at it together.*)

SMYTHE. (*Bringing Teddy down tragically.*) Rash youth, what have you done? If Beamish should discover that portrait—

TEDDY. Oh, but he would never suspect. I've taken care of that. I painted it myself, you know, and it isn't a bit like me any more than your music is— (*Smythe looks at him.*)

HORNGOLD. No, I can't make it out. We'll ask Beamish who it is. (*Music till Jack on.*)

(*Noise outside—Beamish calling to Van.*) And here he comes—

(*Enter Jack Beamish, throwing aside his cap and greeting them all cordially, then goes to back.*)

JACK. (*Speaking off to dog.*) Don't forget your appointment, you rascal! I want you to sit to me in an hour, so none of your prowling about the neighborhood, do you hear? (*To Madge.*) Warrington is better, the babies have had a good breakfast, and now I can get to my work with an easy heart. Halloo, Sebastian, where are you off to?

SMYTHE. Oh, taking holiday. We wanted Noel to go with us, but he is asleep—

JACK. (*Seriously.*) Then let him alone. He always says his best ideas come to him in his dreams. (*To Madge, seeing portrait.*) What have you got there, Madge?

SMYTHE. That's just what we want you to tell us. Do you know that head?

JACK. (*Taking portrait and comparing it with all the faces in the room.*) Are you sure it is a head?

TEDDY. (*Aside.*) Oh, Lord, if I could only get out of the room!

JACK. (*Thoughtfully.*) No, it is not a portrait. It must be meant for a landscape. (*Jack goes up and changes coat for blouse, with Madge's help.*)

HORN. (*Roaring with laughter.*) We may as well be off after that.

SMYTHE. Ha! ha! If we have but succeeded in making our dear Teddy thoroughly wretched, we feel we have not wholly wasted an idle hour.

(*Exit, pulling off Horngold.*)

JACK. (*Good-naturedly.*) Never mind, Sprott; don't you let these idle fellows put you out of conceit with your work. You'll be a painter yet, in spite of them.

MADGE. And thank you for your beautiful roses, Mr. Sprott. They shall stand near Jack's easel all day. There! (*Puts jar of flowers there as she speaks.*)

TEDDY. If you please—thank you—Good morning—I'm sure! (*Bows himself awkwardly out.*)

MADGE. Poor boy! He has a very good heart.

JACK. (*Working at Easel.*) You ought to know, child! It has been in your possession this many a day!

(*Enter Noel in Dressing Gown, yawning and sulky.*)

NOEL. What the devil is all this row about?

MADGE. (*Going to Noel.*) Up already, Cousin!

NOEL. Why shouldn't I be up as well as Beamish?

MADGE. Oh, but you know Jack and I are generally at work for hours before you appear on the domestic horizon!

JACK. Noel is not obliged to profit by the daylight for his work, like I am—

MADGE. Nor to get breakfast ready like me. How pale you are! I am afraid you have had a bad night?

NOEL. Wretched! I tossed and turned and could get no rest until daybreak! (*Lies on Sofa and takes up Newspaper.*)

JACK. (*Cheerily.*) I see what it is. He's in one of his dejected moods again. Give him a scolding, Madge!

MADGE. Indeed, I will! But I'll get him something to eat first, so as not to take him at an unfair advantage. You have your Newspaper, Noel? I shall not be long! (*Exit.*)

JACK. Bless that child's bright face! It is not for nothing she lives so near the Sun, in our dingy old attic up here!

NOEL. (*Lying on Sofa and turning over Newspaper.*) I say, Jack? Did you ever hear of a Sir Richard Gaunt?

JACK. Never! Why?

NOEL. It appears there was such a person here in London, and no later than yesterday.

JACK. Has he come to an end already?

NOEL. Worse luck. *Music. (reads.)* "The Musical World has just sustained serious loss in the person of Sir Richard Gaunt, the well known Catholic Baronet, one of the most ardent and eccentric Amateurs in England, who died yesterday in this city."

JACK. (*Painting busily.*) A musical Amateur, Eh! One chance the less for you, old fellow. more's the pity!

NOEL. Yes, but what a windfall for the Heirs! (*Reads.*) "The fortune of the late Baronet is estimated at £30,000 a year. He died unmarried, and leaves none but distant relatives to mourn his loss." By Jove! What luck some people have in this world!

(*Getting up and crossing Stage.*)

JACK. So they have. You and I for instance!

NOEL. (*Stops and looks at Jack.*) You and I! you don't consider yourself lucky!

JACK. Lucky! I consider myself simply the most fortunate fellow in the world. I have the honor to be an honest man. I never bother my head about politics, or the money market. I don't go into society, and to crown it all, I am the intimate friend of a great musician, called Noel Blake. What the deuce could I wish for besides!

NOEL. (*Gloomily.*) Money! (*Goes back to Sofa.*)

JACK. Money! we've got money! There's 5 shillings still in the Bureau, to say nothing of 18 pence or so, in my waistcoat pocket. money indeed, you young Sardanapalus!

NOEL. Ah, Beamish, it's all very well for you to make light of our poverty; but when I think that I am living on your scanty earnings; that I am actually reduced to accepting your bounty!

JACK. There you go again! I'm a great creature, of course! A perfect paragon of friendship! That's understood, old boy, so say no more about it.

NOEL. (*Leaning on Jack's Chair.*) I tell you, I can't help talking of it, when I see you wasting your life, day by day, in the useless sacrifice you have undertaken. Do you think I am deceived by your careless words and looks, and that I haven't heard you sigh many and many time, when your eyes turn wearily from those infernal "Pot-boilers" and fall on the sketch of your great picture over there, that you will never find time to finish.

JACK (*turning around.*) What a loss to posterity! And I'll thank you not to talk so disrespectfully of my portraits; I'm rather proud of them, myself!

NOEL Look here, Jack! I am getting discouraged. Here you are sacrificing your own works and your own life to mine, and what if the great artist of us two, should turn out to be yourself after all?

JACK. (*Coming down to Noel.*) The old story, my boy; my works, my sacrifice; There's no such great merit in all that as you seem to think. We had two empty purses between us, and we joined them into one—that's all. You couldn't make a decent living by your music pupils—and yet they absorbed the time that should have been devoted to some great composition, I was compelled to leave my picture every now and then for one of these little commercial transactions (*touching easel*) and neither of us seemed to advance a peg.

NOEL. I know all that; but—

JACK. I looked the matter straight in the face, and I said to myself, "Noel and I have a wall to climb. The ladder is long and narrow and the wind is high: If we both mount together the ladder will break. Let Noel go up first while I hold it steady against the wall, and when he has reached the top, he can lend me a helping hand in return."

NOEL. At least we could have drawn lots for the first mount;

JACK. Nonsense old fellow; you are nimbler than me, and more likely to rise. Besides I have one virtue, I believe, which you do not possess, the like virtue of patience; What does a year's delay matter to me? my goal is close at hand, and it won't take me long to reach it when once I start, but your road is infinite—endless—and you had no time to lose in getting on the way.

NOEL. And I am on the way at last, thanks to you; I have written a symphony which you pronounce good;

JACK. Great!

NOEL. Well, great. And I have offered it to the Phillharmonic Society for production—But though it has been in their hands now for over three months, they have not condescended to give me a hearing.

JACK. Patience! patience! (*goes back to easel*) The Symphony is written anyhow and well written! It has my approval, as you are aware, and I think no small beer of my musical taste. Madge is charmed with it, and you remember how delighted that old man was, the noble stranger as I call him, when he heard her play it that evening.

NOEL. Some old lunatic! By jove! the way he burst into the room was decidedly suggestive of a straight waistcoat!

JACK. Yes, but the exit he made more than redeemed his character! "There are £10 on account, Mr. Beamish," said he, when he ordered this picture, and the speech struck me as being remarkably eloquent!

NOEL. Much good that did us! The £10, are nearly gone already.

JACK. Well, that was two months ago, you must remember, and then we have had Warrington's illness—By the way his wife had no money left when I was there this morning, we must try and get her a trifle—There's that sketch would fetch a few shillings I daresay.

NOEL. Another starving genius—Its no use your talking, Beamish, this is a miserable world!

JACK. Oh I don't know—after all it's not so easy to find places for scholars, who all want to be at the head of the class.

NOEL (*walking about*). To think that a set of numskulls and idiots should be rolling in riches and luxury all around us, and here we are, three men of talent, Warrington, you, and myself, one of us is dying of hunger, another can't find leisure to develop the gift God gave him, and the third is denied so much as a hearing from the public. It's infamous

JACK. (*slapping him kindly on shoulder.*) I'm half afraid, Noel, that you have a grain of envy in your disposition, Beware of that, lad! It is an evil weed, and it will spring up apace and choke every good growth in your heart, unless you pluck it out!

NOEL (*impatiently*). To hear you talk one would think I ought to submit tamely to being kept down.

JACK. Who the deuce is keeping you down? you are obliged to wait awhile—that's all, you are a spoiled child, Master Noel, and you fret and fume under the suffering that is the cost of all true glory.

NOEL. You see everything through rose colored spectacles.

JACK. Well, they are just as cheap as green ones, and a great deal more cheerful!

NOEL. I suppose if fortune were ever to knock at your door, you would shut it in her face?

JACK. I should if I were wise. I make a decent poor man, who knows what I might turn out rich!

NOEL. You—the cream of men!

JACK. Yes, but cream is apt to turn! Just think what it must be to be worth millions, never to know what it was to long for anything, but to be able to gratify every caprice, no matter how unwholesome, that entered your head, The bare idea frightens me!

NOEL. I only wish—I had the chance!

JACK. Well, suppose you had—suppose you were to discover a gold mine to-morrow. How many times could you dine the day after? How many pairs of boots could you wear at a time, and how many hats?

NOEL. I should be content to dine once, I dare say, and to wear one pair of boots, but I could give you an order for £5,000 worth of pictures, old fellow.

JACK. Ah!

NOEL. I could send £100 pounds to that unfortunate Warrington and his hungry babies.

JACK. Good!

NOEL. I would have my symphony produced in a theatre of my own.

JACK. Bravo!

NOEL. And, dear old fellow, I am going to lay bare my heart, and show you the real wound which causes this fever of impatience in me. I could marry the woman I love!

JACK. (*Surprised.*) You are in love?

NOEL. Hush!

(*Enter Madge with small tray, which she lays on stand at Noel's elbow.*)

MADGE. There is your coffee, cousin.

JACK. Noel, just hand me my vermillion, will you?

NOEL. (*Sitting down.*) Give it to him, Madge; there it is. (*Points. He is down on sofa.*)

MADGE. (*Takes color to Jack—stands behind his chair, watching him paint.*) Have you nearly finished?

JACK. All but the head of the distinguished *Incognito*. I can't catch the expression, somehow, the miniature he sent me is so poor!

MADGE. And then Van is only sketched in as yet.

JACK. I can't get the rascal to sit. He knows I am after him, and he won't show his nose inside the door. This modesty is very ill-timed, upon my soul.

MADGE. This is his breakfast-hour, you know. I daresay he has come in. Shall I go and see if I can coax him to give you a sitting?

JACK. I'm afraid he'll see through all your blandishments, child. However, you certainly have more influence over him than anybody else, and if you can induce him to listen to reason—

MADGE. (*Seriously.*) I'll try. Perhaps I had better tell him the truth at once and appeal to his own good sense. (*Runs off.*)

JACK. (*To Noel.*) By the way, you were going to tell me about your love affair.

NOEL. That is soon done. I am in love with—Madge.

JACK. (*Turning round, amazed.*) With Madge—your cousin—our child?

NOEL. She was a child when my father died, and I became her guardian; but four years have changed the little girl into a woman.

JACK. But what put it into your head to fall in love with her? She is like a sister to you almost; and—

NOEL. Does any one know why they fall in love?

JACK. And do you think she suspects? Does she know that you love her?

NOEL. (*Gloomily.*) I don't know. I have never dared to ask her. What would be the good? I am too poor to marry.

JACK. True; you are too poor to marry.

NOEL. If I was only sure of my talent, then—

JACK. (*Abruptly.*) Yes, yes. But as your symphony has not been produced, of course you cannot be sure. (*Returns to his painting.*)

NOEL. You see I have better cause than you supposed for my impatience and discontent.

JACK. Yes, I see. (*A pause.*) Are you going out this morning to get a breath of air?

NOEL. No, I feel blue.

JACK. By-the-bye, there is the money for Warrington's wife I was forgetting. I wish you'd take that sketch round to old Scrawly's and see what he'll stand for it.

NOEL. Oh, there's no hurry. You can leave it the next time you pass by.

JACK. But Warrington is expecting the tin, and if you—

NOEL. I feel good for nothing to-day.

JACK. Not only to-day, by Jove! You would like me to leave my work, I suppose, while you lie here on the broad of your back, doing nothing.

NOEL. Hang it, you needn't take that tone.

JACK. Well, it's true. You expect us to coddle you all day long as if you were a girl. God bless my soul, the man doesn't live twenty miles away.

NOEL. (*Rising.*) All right. I'm going; where's the sketch?

JACK. On the mantelpiece, there under my mother's miniature.

NOEL. Old Scrawley would be more likely to stand something on that; the frame would go a long way with him.

JACK. I daresay, but I have never parted with it yet, and we have been in some sore scrapes too.

NOEL. You need not remind me of the fact, I am only too well aware that I have been the chief cause of them. (*Business and exit.*)

JACK. Idle, useless, selfish fellow, he thinks he is to take all and give nothing. This is what comes of devoting one's self, body and soul, to one of these feeble vacillating natures. This the gratitude — (*checking himself.*) What ails me? Why am I so hard upon the lad? Can it be that I — ? Pooh, nonsense! That would be a good joke. Jack Beamish in love! Ah, no. Love is not meant for fellows like me. What is there in me to take any girl's fancy? No; I was born to play uncle in some other man's nursery; only let me see Noel happy and famous, and I will be content to find my happiness and my glory in applauding his works and dancing his children on my knees. And—and—will you stop whining, you beast? (*Rising and buttoning his coat with an attempt at briskness.*) Egad, it was about time this confidence of Noel's came to open my eyes. I don't know where I had not been wandering in my selfish, stupid dreams, of late. However, that is all over now. (*Singing, as he sits against the easel; breaks off.*) Perhaps, though, she does not love him. Oh, but she does—she must? How could she help it? Let me make sure of it at once, and then—they shall be married, come what may. I must put a barrier between little Madge and my own folly. Here she is.

(*Enter Madge.*)

MADGE. (*Despairingly.*) It's no use, Jack; Van says he will not come.

JACK. (*Rising from easel and coming down.*) So much the better child, I want to speak to you alone.

MADGE. What is it you have to say?

JACK. I want to know whether—whether you love your cousin Noel?

MADGE. (*Sitting down to work basket.*) What a question! I should be the most ungrateful girl in the world if I did not love him. When my poor uncle died he left me to Noel's care, and you know how good my cousin has been to me ever since.

JACK. He couldn't very well have left you in the street, could he?

MADGE. And what about your share in the good work, dear? I was no relation of yours, and yet you have been as kind as Noel.

JACK. Oh, very kind! I wonder what we should have done, we two graceless bachelors, without our thrifty little, sunny little housekeeper to look after us. Ah, you don't know me, my child. I wanted some one to sew on my buttons and pour out my coffee; that was all. I am a deep fellow, I tell you.

MADGE. (*Fondly.*) You dear old Jack! But what touches me more than all, now that I am old enough to understand such things, is the change you both made in your careless Bohemian life.

JACK. That fact alone, my child, more than pays whatever debt you think you owe your two big brothers.

MADGE. And then you ask me if I love you both? Oh, you stupid old Jack, was that your grand secret?

JACK. I confess the question was stupid, child, but that was not all I had to say.

MADGE. I thought not.

JACK. Madge, haven't you noticed lately how unhappy and depressed Noel has appeared?

MADGE. (*Quickly looking up.*) Yes, indeed I have, but I did not like to speak of it. Ah, Jack, is there anything amiss? Do you think he can have any secret trouble?

JACK. He is in love!

MADGE. (*Letting her work fall on her lap.*) Noel, in love! Oh, impossible; with whom, Jack?

JACK. (*Pacing up and down with his hands in pockets.*) With a woman he cannot marry, because he is too poor.

MADGE. Did he tell you so himself?

JACK (*nodding*). Not half an hour ago.

MADGE. He did. Then it is really true!

JACK. There's nothing so very surprising in it after all.

MADGE. No; of course not. I suppose it is quite natural. But are you quite sure he loves this woman?

JACK (*grimly smiling*). Only too sure.

MADGE. (*Brightening*.) Perhaps she does not love him, though?

JACK. (*Pausing by her chair*.) Poor child! She is over head and ears in love with him, though she does not know it herself!

MADGE. (*Puzzled*.) Does not know she is in love? Oh, Jack, that seems impossible, dear!

JACK. She is such an innocent little darling that she takes her love for affection, or friendship. But she is jealous of him. She turns pale at the thought of his marrying another woman. Her voice breaks; her hand trembles. (*Aside*.) I feel an itching desire to smash every chair in the room! (*Turns up*.)

(*Enter Major Spott Whyte.*)

MAJOR. (*Outside*.) Down, down, I say, you ugly brute?

JACK. Halloa! Some one is abusing Van out there!

MAJOR. (*Entering*.) Excuse my entering so unceremoniously, but there is no knocker, and I found the key outside, which looks as if your visitors were in the habit of entering unannounced!

JACK. So they are, when they don't know any better.

MAJOR. (*Advancing*.) But, egad! your doorkeeper was inclined to treat me rather roughly.

JACK. (*Looking him over coolly*.) Then he didn't like your looks!

(*Jack goes on with his painting.*)

MAJOR. (*Drawing himself up with a forced smile*.) His own appearance hardly gives him the right to be fastidious.

JACK. (*Aside*.) I don't think he was in this instance!

MAJOR. (*Bowing to Madge*) (*To Jack*.) Mr. Blake, I believe?

JACK. (*Painting*.) No; my name is Beamish.

MADGE. (*Interposing gently*.) Mr. Blake does live here, but he is not at home just now. If you wish to leave any message, Mr. Beamish is his particular friend, and —

MAJOR. Thank you. If you will allow me I would rather wait.

JACK. You have my permission.

MADGE. (*Aside to Jack*.) You must not be so rude, you great bear!

JACK. (*Aside*.) I don't like the fellow's face, neither did Van, and Van and I have a good eye for faces.

MAJOR. (*Aside*.) These artists are certainly not the best bred people in the world. The girl is pretty. Wonder what she is doing here?

(*Noise outside.*)

MADGE. You will not have much longer to wait, I hear Mr. Blake's step on the stairs!

(*Enter Noel. Major rises and bows.*)

MAJOR. Your servant.

NOEL. (*Returning the bow*.) To whom have I the pleasure of speaking?

MAJOR. Major Spott Whyte; Wrangle's Regiment, Austrian service. (*Aside*) This fellow behaves more like a Christian. (*Aloud*.) I have called on a little matter of business.

NOEL. (*Motioning him to a chair*.) I am sorry you should have had to wait.

MAJOR. (*Sitting down*.) Not at all. Your friend has done the honors in your absence.

JACK. (*To Madge at easel*.) Amiable fiction!

NOEL. Is the matter in question of a private nature?

MAJOR. No; no. It is connected with your business.

NOEL. My business.

MAJOR. I mean your profession. I dare say, now, you have a Requiem or a De Profundis in your Portfolio! something short of a lugubrious description.

NOEL. (*Leaning against piano.*) An unrecognized composer is sure to have his hands full of attempts in every style. But may I ask what has procured me the honor of this request? I have little or no reputation, I am aware, as yet, and—

MAJOR. That is easily explained; I am a relative of the late Sir Richard Gaunt.

NOEL. The Musical Amateur who lately died—

MAJOR. You are aware, perhaps, that my cousin, in consequence of a domestic affliction which occurred many years ago, had become embittered, fanatical, and lived an almost Monastic life at his fine old seat in Sussex. Music was his only passion, and he squandered—I mean he devoted much time and money to the encouragement of the Art!

NOEL. But may I ask?—

MAJOR. Certainly. He often told me, during his last moments, that it was his ardent desire to have one of your compositions performed at his obsequies, and I make a point of gratifying this curious caprice of a dying man.

NOEL. Curious, indeed. I never heard of Sir Richard Gaunt, until to-day.

MAJOR. It appears he had heard of you, however, the poor dear soul was a very weary of praising your Music.

NOEL. Then as a token of gratitude to my solitary admirer, allow me to present you with what you came here to buy.

MAJOR. By no means—on no account! Business is business, and I could not think of—

(*Noel goes to Piano in search of Music. Jack comes forward.*)

MAJOR. (*Aside.*) I don't suppose the fellow means it!

JACK. As you say—business is business—the price of the Requiem is £20.

MAJOR. I beg your pardon—

JACK. £20—money down.

MAJOR. Oh, by all means. (*Aside.*) I thought it was too good to be true!

NOEL. (*presenting roll of Music.*) I think this will answer your requirements.

MAJOR. Dear me? It appears to be an endless affair. There is enough Music here to bury 20 people, I should say.

NOEL. Don't be alarmed! It is merely the Orchestration—the Band parts, which make it appear as bulky.

MAJOR. I br athe again, (*calling*) William!

(*Enter Servant.*)

Take this parcel. (*to Noel.*) Mr. Blake, I am exceedingly obliged to you. Here are the £20 you demand.

(*Offers purse. Jack makes a movement to take purse. Noel slops his arm. The purse falls to ground.*) (*This Bus. and what follows very marked.*)

NOEL, (*pushing it with his foot to Servant.*) William, I am afraid my Music is somewhat heavy; there is a trifle for your pains.

(*William picks it up and offers it to Major, who returns it to his pocket.*)

MAJOR. (*To Noel.*) Please yourself, my young Prince! Now, Williams!

(*Ex't Major followed by Servant.*)

NOEL. (*Angrily.*) Was there ever anything to equal the insolence of these rich people?

JACK. Never! unless it be the pride of these poor people! That £20 would have come in very handy just now for us, and for poor Warrington.

NOEL. Perhaps, it would; but I have had a £100 worth of pleasure, in flinging it in the teeth of that impertinent, Idiot!

JACK. Oh, in that case you have saved a clear £80, and I have nothing more to say. Indeed, we have something more interesting to talk about. You, Noel and Madge!

MADGE. Me, Jack?

JACK. Yes. (*Music.*)

(*Footman bolting in as if in fear of a dog, with nervous glances at his heels.*)

FOOTMAN. Lady Blanchmayne—Miss Blanchmayne.

JACK. What, the deuce!—we shall have the whole Court gnide down upon us, and Van is at his old tricks again. I see

(Noel goes to the door and meets Lady B., who hastily enters with her Daughter.)

LADY B. Really, a very formidable animal!

BABY. Dreadful! He made Jenkins jump, until the powder flew out of his hair, didn't he Mamma?

MADGE. (*Advancing.*) He does not mean to be rude. Pray, come in!

LADY B. Mr. Noel Blake?

NOEL. (*bowing.*) Madam!

LADY B. I have a little favor to request of you. Don't let me disturb anyone, please!

(Jack has returned to his painting, taking no notice of the ladies after a careless bow.)

MADGE. (*Offering chairs.*) Won't you sit down?

LADY B. Thank you. I have only a few words to say to your husband.

MADGE. (*Aside.*) My husband!

LADY B. And as I know his time is valuable, I will explain the object of my visit at once. I daresay, Mr. Blake, you have something of a melancholy nature among your musical odds and ends? A requiem, or —

JACK. (*Still busy painting.*) Not such a thing left. We have this very moment disposed of the last one we had in stock. But if you would like a nice funeral march now, we can let you have one in capital condition, and on reasonable terms.

LADY B. This is some joke. I suppose?

NOEL. No, it is the truth; a certain Major Spott Whyte has forestalled you, I am sorry to say.

LADY B. Major Whyte, I understand. (*Aside*) He thought it would make a pretty paragraph for the *Morning Post* no doubt, but I will not be outdone.

JACK. He has made a clean sweep of our requiems.

LADY B. I regret this exceedingly, as it deprives me of the mournful gratification I should have experienced in satisfying the last desire expressed by a beloved relative. But I will not be beaten; and since the Major has carried off the requiem I suppose I must content myself with the march your friend mentions.

NOEL. Very well.

LADY B. I cannot think of bargaining with an artist of your merit, of course, so pray be kind enough to name your own terms.

NOEL. I will not ask you to pay for what I offered to Major Whyte for nothing.

LADY B. For nothing?

NOEL. Oh, the gentleman did not do me the favor of accepting it, I must admit. He insisted on flinging me a gratuity.

LADY B. (*Rising.*) I shall be very happy to accept your music on condition that you will allow me to send a little souvenir to this lady.

JACK. (*Aside.*) Now, that is something like! This woman has been decently brought up.

BABY, (*who has been examining room and now approaches easel.*) Oh, mamma, come and see our cousin's portrait: isn't it, mamma?

LADY B. (*Going to easel and putting up eyeglass.*) Sir Richard himself, and what an admirable likeness!

NOEL. Is it possible?

JACK. Oh! He was the noble stranger, was he? I begin to understand now.

LADY B. (*To Jack.*) You don't mean to say you were painting his portrait without knowing his name?

JACK. (*Painting steadily.*) Curious—but true.

LADY B. And how comes he to figure in the scene you are producing there. A picture of this room, is it not? I recognize the likeness of your friend, too, and yourself, and of that very unpleasant dog, though he is merely sketched in as yet.

JACK. Yes, but Van is a very important member of the family in his own estimation as well as ours,

BABY. Van! What a funny name, isn't it mamma?

JACK. He allows us to take liberties with his title, and that's about all. His proper name is Vandy Re Brown, and I beg to introduce him as the worst tempered, most conceited, and warmest hearted dog in London or the world.

LADY B. There is evidently some story connected with this picture?

MADGE. Indeed yes, a story we are all very proud of.

BABY. Oh, do tell it to us. I love stories, don't I, mamma?

LADY B. My dear, pray do not be so indiscreet.

MADGE. But I shall be very glad to tell your daughter how we came to know Sir Richard, whom we have always spoken of as the "stranger" until now.

(*Lady B. sits near easel. Noel at piano sorting music.*)

BABY. Oh, please go on then. What a nice girl you are; isn't she, mamma?

LADY B. My dear! (*To Madge.*) We are all attention.

MADGE. (*Music.*) We were all sitting in this very room one evening; Noel had just finished his symphony, and I was trying it over on the piano. Just as the last bars died away we saw the door open softly and a tall dark figure stole in, in the dusk.

JACK. Old, dry, wrinkled, nose like an eagle's beak, ivory-headed cane, carved ring on little finger.

BABY. That's him exactly! How clever you are—isn't he, mamma?

LADY B. My dear, (*To Madge.*) Pray go on.

MADGE. "I was passing by," he said, "and the piano arrested my attention. Who is the composer of the music you have been playing? It is worthy of Beethoven?"

JACK. "The composer is my friend, Noel Blake," said I, as proud as you please. And then the old gentleman ask'd Madge to play the symphony over again. When she had finished, he walked up to Noel and laid his kind, trembling old hands on his head. "Mr. Blake," said he, solemnly, "you are a master." And he knew what he was talking about.

MADGE. After that he sat down amongst us and questioned us about ourselves, and our life, and our hopes, in such a fatherly, encouraging way, that we told him everything. "I have spent the happiest hours of my life in this little room," he said, smiling in his quaint, benevolent way. "Mr. Beamish, oblige me by painting a picture that will remind me of this scene in after days." (*Music stops.*)

JACK. With that he pulled out a £10 note, which he gave me on account, and vanished before we thought of asking his name.

MADGE. That is all. We have never seen him since.

BABY. Oh, it's too short a story. And they told it so well, too—didn't they, mamma?

LADY B. My dear—(*to Jack*)—Sir Richard was taken ill towards the close of Spring. I regret to say, and in spite of all our care he never rallied.

JACK. Poor, dear, generous soul!

LADY B. (*Rising.*) Really, your little history has interested me so greatly that I am forgetting how much I have to do. (*To Madge.*) Allow me to thank you for the happiness you were the means of bestowing on my poor, dear cousin. You will not, I am sure, refuse to accept a little remembrance from me, as a slight acknowledgment of Mr. Blake's kindness?

MADGE. I accept it gladly, in my cousin's name and my own.

LADY B. Your cousin, Oh, (*sharply.*) Baby, come away, my dear! Francis, (*to servant,*) take this parcel!

BABY. Shall we come here again some day, mamma? They are such amusing people, and it is such a funny little room isn't it, mamma?

LADY B. My dear! (*To Noel.*) Pray don't disturb yourself. Come, Baby.

(*Exit, with her daughter.*)

NOEL. (*With enthusiasm.*) There goes a charming woman! That is what I call a fine lady, in the true sense of the word!

MADGE. (*Dubiously.*) She was very gracious, certainly.

JACK. Did you notice, Noel, how stiff our fine lady grew, all of a sudden, when she found out that Madge was only your cousin?

NOEL. No.

(*Enter Footman, with small packet.*)

FOOTMAN. (*Giving it to Noel.*) With Lady Blanchmayne's compliments. (*Exit.*)

NOEL. (*Handing it to Madge.*) Her present to Madge already.

MADGE. (*Eagerly, and feeling the packet with childish curiosity.*) I wonder what it is?

JACK. Lady Blanchmayne's present looks to me uncommonly like money.

NOEL. Absurd!

MADGE. Let us see. (*Undoing packet.*) Jack is right—she has sent me money. (*Puzzled and grieved.*)

JACK. You see!

NOEL. Why this is a greater piece of impertinence than the Baron's. (*Making for money—Jack intercepts and pockets it.*)

JACK. No more expensive treats to day; the exchequer won't stand it. Lady

Blanchmayne is not to blame; she offered a remembrance to your wife, not to your cousin.

NOEL. What do you mean? (*A pause.*) Can she have thought— Oh, but I will run after her and explain.

JACK. She will not care for your explanations. We must remember that the world is not in the secret of our happy little household, and can only judge from appearances.

MADGE. What do you mean, Jack?

JACK. Nothing that you would understand, my dear little girl. Leave it to Noel and me. (*To Noel.*) Madge is no longer a child; you said so yourself just now. What do you suppose people must think of her living here with two harum-scarum fellows like us?

NOEL. If they dare —

JACK. That is all very fine, my boy; but you see at our first contact with the outside world we are made to feel what a false position we have thoughtlessly brought the child into.

NOEL. That is true —

MADGE, (*frightened*). But you will not send me away, Jack! I shall break my heart if I am separated from you both—and Van!

JACK. Don't be afraid, dear! I am merely anxious to prevent all such misunderstandings in the future. And (*with a sigh*) the means are very simple. Noel, you lucky dog, our little Madge loves you!

MADGE, (*Startled*). Oh, Jack, who told you so?

JACK. Don't blush, you foolish little woman! No one told me. I saw it for myself plainly enough a little while ago.

MADGE. But you said Noel was in love with—I don't understand.

JACK. It is you he loves, Madge, and no one else.

MADGE, (*Shyly*). Is that true, Noel?

NOEL, (*Smiling*). Hasn't Beamish told you so?

MADGE. Oh, I am so happy—you dreadful Jack! How you frightened me, and how dearly I do love you! (*Throws her arms round his neck*)

JACK, (*Patting her gently away*). God bless you, my child! (*aside*) And so I subside into the character of an uncle for the rest of my life.

NOEL. And have you nothing to say to me, Madge?

MADGE. To you? (*Gives hand, he draws her to him, and kisses her*)

JACK, (*In a cheery manner*). And now, Miss Heskett, let me advise you to look to your tuckers and furbelows. You shall be married in a month.

NOEL, (*Bitterly*). We are too poor to marry!

JACK. Oh, you are thinking of the children, I suppose. They will bring you more gold in their yellow curls than ever they will take from you for shoes and stockings; and so long as they have plenty of bread and milk they won't be particular about a silver spoon!

MADGE, (*Holding out disengaged hand to Jack*). Dear Jack! It is to you we owe our happiness.

JACK. Be happy, child, that is your old brother's only wish! (*Aside*.) Phew! what a load that is off my hands!

(*Smythe putting head in at door.*)

SMYTHE. I trust you have not been lonely without us?

(*Enter Horngold.*)

MADGE. Back already! Come in; come in!

HORNGOLD. We met the postman on the stairs with a letter for Jack, and I offered to bring it to these airy heights whereon he dwells! (*Gives it.*)

NOEL. By Jove! a formidable looking epistle, truly!

JACK, Sealed with black! Another order for a Requiem, old boy! Let us see! (*Reads.*)

"SIR,

"In accordance with the wish of my late client, Sir Richard Gaunt, I summon you, your friend Mr. Blake, and his cousin, Miss Heskett, to be present at the reading of the said Sir Richard's will, which will take place at his late residence, Field Royal, near Blomborough, Sussex, on Thursday next, at noon, precisely.

"I have the honor to be

"Your obedient servant,

"SAMUEL SMYTHE."

What does it all mean?

SMYTHE. It is as plain as the nose on Teddy's face! The estimable defunct has evidently left you each a legacy!

NOEL. No such luck!

HORNGOLD. Who knows. I'd give ten years of Teddy Sprott's life to be in your shoes at any rate! But who the deuce is or was Sr Richard Gaunt.

JACK. O a noble stranger, to be sure?

NOEL. The man who ordered the picture of Jack, some months ago, I suppose this law business has something to do with that.

MADGE. Oh, Jack, do you think I need go?

JACK. Go, of course you'll go, child! It will be a little trip for you. By Jove! her Ladyship's money comes in the very nick of time. I'll take my sketch book and fill up a few bits by the way.

NOEL. We shall meet our visitors of to-day, there, I suppose, (*with an uneasy sigh*) How they will stare!

JACK. And hear your Music, Noel! That will be a treat at any rate.

HORNGOLD. What lucky beggars you are!

NOEL, (*who has been reading letter.*) At noon precisely, on Thursday, the 18th. Why, that's to-morrow. By Jove! we have no time to lose; How are we to get to that place? I had better go and make enquiries at once!

JACK, (*slinging color box over shoulder.*) I'm ready; I've only to whistle to Van.

NOEL, (*who is secretly excited.*) Don't you think it would be as well to take an extra coat?

JACK. (*Aside.*) Egad, it would puzzle me! (*Aloud in an airy way*) No, no. This is quite good enough to travel in. Isn't it, Madge?

SMYTHE. Well, a pleasant journey to you, Miss Heskett. Good bye, Jack, old fellow. And best wishes go with you all!

HORN. We'll drop in the day after to-morrow and hear the news. (*Music till end of Act.*)

MADGE, (*passing at door of her own chamber.*) Good bye, dear little room, till I see you again. Ah, Jack! we are going into a new world, but what if we are leaving our old happiness behind!

JACK. If we are child, we shall know where it is, at least, and we will come back here again to find it.

NOEL, (*reading letter.*) On Thursday, at noon precise'y!

ARTISTS Three cheers for the travelers!

(*Cheers, waving of Caps, &c., as Madge and Jack stand in the doorway. Noel at Table absorbed in the Lawyer's letter. Bohemians Exit as Curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN.



ACT II.

SCENE: *Drawing-room at Field Royal; Large Bay Window C looking on Laven; Enter Smylie R; Mrs. Bunn discovered arranging Furniture, etc.; Music.*

SMYLIE. Good moining, good morning, Mrs Bunn. Everything in apple-pie order, I see. That's well, that's well. We sha'll have the relations down upon us before we know where we are.

MRS. B. (*Who is in mourning.*) Eh, dear, dear, sir, it's little I thought to see the day when Field Royal, where I have lived, maid, wife and widow, these forty years, would pass out of the hands of the Gaunts, and be given up to strangers.

SMYLIE. Ah, to be sure, to be sure. It's very sad, very, sad, indeed, to see the old name die out. I did hope that poor Sir Richard would have shown some desire for a reconciliation with his daughter, after all these long years of estrangement; but I was mistaken—quite mistaken, I regret to say.

MRS. B. Ah, dear me, sir, if we could only be sure that the poor dear lady was alive, even—

SMYLIE. Yes, yes. But all my inquiries have hitherto resulted in disappointment. My advertisements have met with no replies, and I am afraid, I am very much afraid— (*Shaking head.*)

(*Enter Withers, an old, white-headed man.*)

SMYLIE. Some one arriving. Withers, eh?

WITHERS. Yes, sir; her ladyship and Miss Blanchmayne.

SMYLIE. Well, well, if you will show me to my room I will get rid of a little of the dust of the road before presenting myself to the ladies.

WITHERS. Certainly, sir. This way, if you please. Mrs. Bunn, you will wait and receive her ladyship. (*Exit, following Smylie, L. H.*)

MRS. B. Receive her ladyship, indeed! I could show her ladyship out with a much better heart.

(*Enter Lady B. and Baby, R. H.*)

LADY B. How is this, Mrs. Bunn—no one to meet me at the door? It is like coming to a hotel.

MRS. B. (*Curtseying stiffly.*) I beg your pardon, my lady; I was giving a few last instructions to the servants.

LADY B. That will be my care in future. I always attend to the household duties in person.

MRS. B. Very well, my lady. (*Aside.*) *She's got the money.*

LADY B. The place is in a wretched condition, I find; the park and gardens, in particular, have been shamefully neglected—grass and weeds choking up all the paths.

MRS. B. You know, my lady, my late master was what people called eccentric. He liked to see the trees and flowers running wild, and gave orders that everybody in his service was to respect what he called the handiwork of Heaven.

LADY B. (*Pulling handkerchief to eyes.*) Delightful creature! Benevolent being! Too early taken from his sorrowing family. (*To Mrs. B.*) I shall see that these walks are weeded and laid down with gravel directly.

MRS. B. Certainly, my lady. (*Aside.*) Oh, it's as clear as day—the money's left to her.

LADY B. Major Whyte has not yet arrived?

MRS. B. Not yet, my lady.

LADY B. Very well, that will do; you can go. Oh, Mrs Bunn, you will see that my maid is comfortable, please, and has all that she requires!

MRS. B. Yes, my lady.

(*Exit.*)

BABY. (*Sitting down with a sigh.*) How I wish it was 12 o'clock! After the will is read I can marry Bertie, can't I, mamma?

LADY B. What do you say, child?

BABY. I said that, now I am going to be so rich, there is nothing to prevent my marrying Bertie, is there, mamma?

LADY B. Am I not to be consulted, then, in the matter?

BABY. But, mamma, when you wanted me to marry Sir Richard you used to say that he was very old, and that as soon as ever I was a widow I might have Bertie, if I liked.

LADY B. Are you a widow?

BABY. It is not my fault if I am not. I would have accepted Sir Richard, only he never proposed, and I couldn't propose, could I, mamma? So it isn't my fault.

LADY B. Is it mine?

BABY. (*Emphatically.*) No indeed, mamma; but—

LADY B. No buts! I want you to understand, once for all, that I have no intention of throwing my daughter, at the head of a beggarly clerk in the twelve to four office!

BABY. But I am so awfully in love with him Mamma!

LADY B. You are in love with his moustache, or his pretty little air of fatigue and mystery.

BABY. Well, the poor fellow is weighed down by state secrets, of course, isn't he mamma?

LADY B. Or by an endeavor to invent some means of disposing of his time during office hours, when he has finished reading the news papers, and polishing his nails!

BABY. Yes mamma, he says that is what bothers him, poor boy! and that the clerks are sometimes actually reduced to writing poetry. He recited some of his to me, at Lady Fellowes one day, such touching lines, aren't they mamma?

12 to 1 There's nothing done,
1 to 2 There's nothing to do,
2 to 3 We begin to see,
That 3 to 4 Is an awful bore! (*sighs deeply*)

(*Enter Major Whyte. R. H.*)

MAJOR. Ah, my dear lady, Lady Blanchmayne, Miss Blanchmayne! I kiss your hand! First in the field, my dear lady, I see!

LADY B. On this occasion, only, my dear, Major! I am sure I hope your anxiety in the matter of the Requiem, which I heard of yesterday, may be rewarded as it deserves.

MAJOR. (*coolly.*) Oh, your ladyship actually condescended to enter into rivalry with me, then?

LADY B. It cannot be possible, Major, that you are still expecting to inherit?

MAJOR. May I ask, if you are indulging in any such seductive vision?

LADY B. I really thought you had passed the age of illusions, Major.

MAJOR. Oh, Lady Blanchmayne, when I still think so well of you.

LADY B. My poor Major! people had unfortunately lowered you sadly in my cousins estimation.

MAJOR. Indeed, and may I ask how?

LADY B. By speaking the truth about you!

BABY. He used to say that you were a spendthrift, that if he left you his fortune you would swallow it in one gulp; and so you would, wouldn't he, Mamma?

LADY B. My dear, be more guarded in your expressions I pray! I must do Sir Richard the justice to say, Major, that in spite of all this, he was often good enough to pity you, though, as he was aware that you were counting on this inheritance to pay your debts, I think he pitied your creditors still more!

BABY. And now you see it is our debts, and not yours, that will be paid, isn't it, Mamma?

MAJOR. (*Laughing.*) Delicious candor!

LADY B. (*Aside to Baby.*) Hold your tongue, you goose, do. (*Aloud.*) My dear child, pray go and ask Spicer for my fan; perhaps I may have left it in the carriage.

BABY. No, mamma, there it is hanging from your Chatelaine.

LADY B. Yes, yes; but I mean my other fan.

BABY. Oh, you mean I am to go out of the room, don't you, mamma? I don't mind in the least, now the major has come. *Exit.*

MAJOR. (*Laughing and taking snuff.*) The cunning of a demon and the simplicity of an angel. Really, I wonder how our dear departed relative could ever have withstood such a combination!

LADY B. What am I to infer from that remark?

MAJOR. Come, come, my dear Lady Blanchmayne! Of course we all know you wanted poor Sir Richard to marry your charming daughter!

LADY B. And have we not heard something of your attempt to induce the unfortunate man to look upon you as a son?

MAJOR. To be sure, Sir Richard was a trifle elderly for such a blooming bride.

LADY B. Though hardly old enough to have a child of your mature age, dear Major!

MAJOR. Well, a truce to compliments, my dear lady, at least for the present. In a moment or two, doubtless, Smylie will be here with our destinies under his arm. (*Noise.*) I hear a carriage. Our good friend and lawyer. (*Goes to window.*) No; I think I know those horses and the young fellow who is driving them. You remember him, do you not, my lady?

LADY B. (*Goes to window and utters an exclamation of annoyance.*) I see you remember him. And do you know, I think Miss Blanchmayne has forgotten your fan. I hear her artless accents in the hall!

(*Re-enter Baby dragging on Bertie. A very languid swell.*)

BABY. Eagerly. Oh, mamma, what do you think? Bertie Ffolliott has come all the way from town.

LADY B. (*Putting up glasses.*) How do you do, Mr. —

BABY. Ffolliott, mamma; Bertie Ffolliott, don't you remember, whom we used to see so much of last season, when he had expectations from his aunt, Lady Chillingham? She is dead now, you know, and has left all her money to some one else; so we don't know Bertie so well this season, do we mamma?

LADY B. My dear! I beg your pardon, Mr. Ffolliott, I did not recognize you at first.

BERTIE. Without the gilding, you mean? It does make a difference. How d'ye do, Major? (*They shake hands.*)

LADY B. (*Taking Baby aside.*) Will you never learn a little common sense? What on earth could induce you to call the young man "Bertie."

BABY. He's not a bit angry. I know he isn't, because he called me Baby.

LADY B. Don't let me see you address another word to him to-day, mind!

BABY. Oh, mamma!

LADY B. Hold your tongue!

BERTIE. By Jove! (*With eye glasses*) Do you know, Lady Blanchmayne is really a splendid woman! the finest shoulders in London, really!

MAJOR. Have you only just made the discovery?

BERTIE. Well, you see, before my aunt died Lady Blanchmayne never gave me an opportunity.

MAJOR. You were summoned, of course?

BERTIE. Yes, deuce only knows why, I suppose, Baby comes in for all the money?

MAJOR. May I ask your reasons for supposing so?

BERTIE. (*Alarm'd.*) With the thermometer at 90, I would rather not undertake to find a reason for anything.

(*Enter Mr. Smylie.*)

SMYLIE. Good morning, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Glad to see you all so punctual.

LADY B. Good morning, Mr. Smylie. I believe the meeting is now complete?

SMYLIE. Not quite, your ladyship, not quite,

MAJOR. For whom are we waiting, may I inquire?

SMYLIE. For one or two people I have been compelled to summon, in accordance with my late client's express desire. If they are not here on the stroke of 12, however, I shall proceed to read the will without them.

MAJOR. Why, it is soon already.

SMYLIE. (*Showing watch.*) I think not, I think not. It wants three minutes, Major Whyte. The sun is always regulated by my watch!

MAJOR. Ready as ever, my dear Smylie. (*Music. Voices heard outside.*)

LADY B. What is all this noise? Really, if we are to be disturbed in this way —

SMYLIE. It is merely our friends arriving, I daresay.

(*Smylie goes to table and sits. Enter Jack, Noel and Mudge, C. Jack is disputing with Withers.*)

JACK. Hang it all, let my dog come in!

WITHERS. I tell you, sir, dogs are not allowed in the drawing rooms.

JACK. (*Advancing*) Ladies, gentlemen, just tell them to let my dog Van come in. He'll lie under the chair and disturb nobody.

MAJOR. (*To Smylie.*) I presume these are the "few people" who have done us the honor to keep us waiting, Mr. Smylie?

SMYLIE. Quite right, Major, quite right. These are the persons to whom Sir Richard wished to show a little posthumous attention. And they are in good time, in good time. It still wants three-quarters of a minute to twelve.

MAJOR. And is this gentleman's dog "Van" mentioned in the will, may I venture to inquire?

SMYLIE. I believe not, Major, I believe not.

MAJOR. In that case we will dispense with his society. (*To Withers.*) Take the brute away!

JACK. (*Talking to dog.*) You hear that, my poor old Van? No admission here except on business. You go and wait for me under the window outside. I shan't be long. And no nonsense now, do you hear?

BABY. Oh, look, mamma! These are the people who live up so high in London, and told us the story yesterday, aren't they, mamma?

LADY B. I believe they are, really. Yes, I recognize the person who sold me the music.

BERTIE. (*Over Baby's chair.*) You actually know these queer people, Miss Blanchmayne?

BABY. Oh, yes; don't we, mamma? We went to see them in such a funny little room under the roof, where there was a piano, and pictures, and things. And the dog growled outside the door, and wanted to bite Jenkins' ankles, didn't he, mamma?

BERTIE. (*With eyeglass, staring at Madge.*) Really, not a bad-looking girl, if she were decently dressed. And now I look again, she's positively pretty!

BABY. (*Eagerly.*) Oh, sweetly pretty! Only I don't like her style. And she's quite plain-looking when you come close to her, isn't she, mamma?

LADY B. My dear!

MAJOR. (*Languidly.*) My little composer, as I live! Good morning, Mr.—ah—Blake! This meeting is an unexpected pleasure, really. I trust you have not repeated your liberality with regard to the requiem—or the money?

NOEL. I am here, sir, by the lawyer's invitation, and shall endeavor to make my intrusion as brief as possible.

MAJOR. I see; very sensible. And your friend in velvetreen, is he also included in Mr. Smylie's invitation?

NOEL. My friend Mr. Beamish can answer for himself, I believe.

MAJOR. Ah, the amiable artist; I recognize him now. No, thanks, I will take him for granted. I can't conceive, though, how Sir Richard came to omit your friend's interesting protégé "Van" from his will!

JACK. (*Seriously.*) Well, the fact is, they were only slightly acquainted.

BERTIE. (*Drawling.*) Fond of dogs, I see!

JACK. (*Curtly.*) Yes, when they are full grown. Poor, old Van! He has only one fault in the world, and that is, an immoderate weakness for trowsers patterns.

LADY B. Really!—this person—

MAJOR. I remember he disputed my entrance, yesterday.

BABY. Yes, and bit Jenkins' calves—didn't he, Mamma?

SMYLIE. Rather an inconvenient possession, this dog! Rather inconvenient!

JACK. Awfully! and expensive too! We have really been obliged to establish a tariff for his little peccadilloes; so much for the mere cloth; so much when his teeth go deeper!

NOEL. (*Aside*) My dear fellow, you can hardly expect these ladies to feel much interested in such details.

JACK. All right! I didn't begin it. But they might be decently polite to Madge, I think, and ask her to sit down. Poor child! you are very tired, aren't you? And your pretty hair is all covered with dust!

MADGE. Oh, never mind, Jack! The journey was very hot and tiresome, certainly; but, as soon as this business is over, we can go back to the Inn in the village, and have dinner in that little room over-looking the river.

JACK. To be sure! I'll stand a bottle of Burgundy. I say, Noel! *turns round*, where is he? I declare, he's making up to her ladyship already. Bless the boy, he takes to fine company like a duck to water!

MADGE. He's talking about his Music, no doubt—look Jack! there is that pretty girl again, who came to the Studio,

NOEL. (*coming down.*) Madge, come here! Why how hot and dusty you look; I want to take you to Lady Blanchmayne.

JACK. That will cool her, at any rate.

NOEL. (*taking Madge up.*) Lady Blanchmayne, you were good enough yesterday to show a little attention to my cousin, Miss Heskett. Will you allow me thank you in the name of my future wife?

LADY B. (*Coldly*) I congratulate you, I am sure; It is never too late to escape from an equivocal position.

MADGE. What did she say, Jack?

JACK. Nothing, child! some fine lady nonsense.

BERTIE. You do marry then, occasionally, you Artists?

JACK. Yes—and occasionally regret it, like you swells.

LADY B. What are we waiting for now, Mr. Smylie?

SMYLIE. Nothing—Nothing more, I believe. Pray be seated, ladies and gentlemen, if you please.

MAJOR. Lady Blanchmayne!

(Offers hand to Lady B. and leads her to chair. Noel takes a seat, absorbed in looking about room, etc. Jack leads Madge, and places her chair near Noel's, sitting a little behind himself. Smylie preparing papers, etc.)

NOEL. What luxury this is, Madge, Eh! Did you ever see such a splendid old room? (All seated.)

MADGE. It is very handsome, certainly, but it looks cold, I think, and formal!

JAK. (Looking about.) Not a corner in it where a fellow could smoke his pipe, with pleasure.

LADY B. We are quite ready, at last, I believe!

SMYLIE. (Sitting at table.) This is the last Will and Testament of Sir Richard Gaunt, on the eve of his death, the Baronet deposited it in my hands himself, closed and sealed with his coat of arms. You all observe that the seals are intact.

(Holding up large Packet.)

JACK. (Half rising.) Perfectly intact, the whole four of them.

MAJOR. Yes, yes; pray go on, Mr Smylie, I beg.

NOEL. Do sit down, Beamish! (Jack sits down.)

SMYLIE. The document being entirely written by the hand of the Testator, is what is technically termed, an olograph—

MAJOR. Go on, pray, go on, Mr Smylie. You are not here, I presume, to give us lessons in Will making. Get to business, Sir, I beg!

SMYLIE. I will delay no longer. (Coughs.) This is the full, free and entire expression of my last wishes. Having always considered my great wealth, as a sacred trust deposited in my hands, I desire that the work of justice and of charity, which I have endeavored to carry out during my lifetime, may not be interrupted by my death.

LADY B. Fear nothing, noble creature.

MAJOR. No, no. Rest in peace, my friend.

SMYLIE. (Reading.) "But as I have met with coldness, neglect and ingratitude from my own flesh and blood, I am compelled to entrust the continuance of the work to the hands of a stranger."

LADY B. (Wounded.) I have not deserved such a word from Sir Richard.

MAJOR. (Reassuring her.) The words are merely figurative, my dear lady. Pray proceed, Mr. Smylie.

SMYLIE. "To Alicia, Lady Blanchmayne, my cousin in the 8th degree, in consideration of the many tedious hours endured by her in an old man's society, I bequeath an annuity of £100."

LADY B. A hundred a year! There must be some ridiculous mistake.

SMYLIE. I have read the passage quite correct, I believe—quite correctly. Repeating. "An annuity of £100."

BABY. Oh, the mean old thing! And he knew all about the debts, too, didn't he, mamma?

MAJOR. (Offering smelling salts.) Dear Lady Blanchmayne!

JACK. (Aside to Madge.) This is good fun, this is.

MADGE. Poor girl, I am sorry for her.

LADY B. (With an amiable air.) Go on, pray, Mr. Smylie.

SMYLIE. (Reading.) "To my cousin by marriage, Major Spott Whyte, of Wrangle's Hussars, in the Austrian service, I bequeath my celebrated Cremona, for which he has always professed so much admiration."

MAJOR. May I trouble you to repeat that passage, my dear Smylie?

SMYLIE. (Reading.) "My celebrated Cremona, for which—"

MAJOR. (Interrupting politely.) Thank you; that will do.

LADY B. (Offering salts.) Dear Major!

(He declines.)

JACK. (To Madge.) This is very good fun, this is.

SMYLIE. (Reading.) "To Mr. Herbert Ffolliott I bequeath the sum of £5,000, which, coupled with his private means, will enable him to marry my cousin, Miss Blanchmayne, and thereby rescue the girl he loves from any less desirable union."

LADY B. (Wrathfully.) Impertinent interference!

BABY. (Clapping her hands.) Oh, what a dear old thing! (Piteously.) Wasn't he, now, Mr. Ffolliott?

BERTIE. (Curling his mustache.) Too dear, Miss Blanchmayne, I'm afraid.

MAJOR. Now that we have each received our whipping, Mr. Smylie, and that in the presence of total strangers, may I venture to enquire who does get all the money?

SMYLIE. That we must soon discover, Major Whyte. (Reads.) "To Miss Haskett—"

MADGE. (*Rising.*) To me?

SMYLIE. "I leave my cameo ring, and I beg that good and charming young lady to wear it in remembrance of her old friend."

MADGE. How kind of him! I will wear the ring as long as I live.

JACK. (*In a satisfied tone.*) This Sir Richard was evidently a man of great discrimination.

SMYLIE. Silence, please, silence! (*Reads.*) "To John Beamish—"

JACK. (*Rising.*) That's me

SMYLIE. (*Reads.*) "Artist, living in London—"

JACK. Great Charlotte St., Fitzroy Square.

SMYLIE. "Desiring to recompense his touching devotion to his friend, Noel Blake."

JACK. Oh, bosh!

SMYLIE. "And to enable him at the same time to cultivate his art with ample freedom from care."

JACK. Ah! that's more like.

SMYLIE. "I bequeath, as the price of a picture ordered by me, and which will become the property of my heir, the sum of £1,000."

JACK. (*Sinking into chair, pulling out handkerchief and mopping his head.*) £1,000!

MADGE. (*Rising and taking his hands in great delight.*) Dear, dear, Jack. I am so glad! Oh, Noel, did you hear?

NOEL. (*Bitterly.*) How well I knew you would be the lucky one!

JACK. Nonsense, man! Doesn't the money belong to both of us—to all three of us!

SMYLIE. Silence, please, silence, gentlemen. (*Reads.*) "With regard to Noel Blake—"

JACK. (*Nodding delightedly.*) Now for your turn, old boy. Another £1,000, I'll bet!

SMYLIE (*reads.*) "As music has been the one great passion of my life, and as I have recognized in this young composer a very exceptional genius—"

JACK. (*Waving handkerchief.*) Hear, hear.

SMYLIE. "I desire to give that genius the ease and leisure necessary to its complete development—"

JACK. (*Excitedly.*) Bravo. (*To Noel.*) What did I tell you?

SMYLIE. "And having little doubt that Noel Blake will make the same use of riches as I have done myself—"

NOEL. Great heavens!

JACK. (*More and more excited.*) I'll answer for him. Go on, go on.

SMYLIE. "I constitute him, with the exception of the aforesaid annuities and bequests, my sole heir!" (*Sits down.*)

NOEL. Me!

(*Jack and Madge congratulate him. Jack throws up his hat, etc.*)

MAJOR. (*Taking snuff.*) That is the last straw. (*Rises.*)

(*Lady B., Baby and Bertie surround Major, eagerly discussing the matter.*)

NOEL. Jack! Madge! Is it a dream?

JACK. It is your favorite dream realized, old man. You wished for money, and, egad, you've got it!

NOEL. £30,000 a year. That's what the paper said! £30,000 a year.

JACK. No more lessons. No more drudgery. What a glorious career is before you, my dear boy. You will give the world a second Mozart!

NOEL. And this splendid place to live in, the house where we were so scornfully received only an hour ago! Ha! It is our turn to laugh now! (*Rubbing his hands excitedly.*)

SMYLIE. (*Coming down.*) Allow me to offer my congratulations, Mr. Blake. You have come in for a very beautiful as well as a wealthy estate. Field Royal is one of the most charming spots in England—in England, I assure you. From this window you can partly judge of the extent of the property, and—

(*Noel, Smylie and Madge go up to window. Jack follows them with his eyes.*)

JACK. To think that my little girl is to be a fine lady, and to walk in silk attire for the rest of her life. (*With emotion.*) Well, God bless her and her husband, say I.

MAJOR. My lady?

LADY B. Major?

MAJOR. Will you oblige me by sending your daughter for that other fan once more?

LADY B. And why, pray?

MAJOR. (*Significantly.*) Oblige me.

LADY B. Oh, if you wish. Baby, my dear, go and say good bye to your property before we start.

BABY. Good bye! Why, I haven't said how-do-you-do to it yet. Have I, mamma?

MAJOR. Then you can kill two birds with one stone, my dear Miss Blanchmayne! (*Takes snuff.*)

(*Jack pointing pencil and sketching through window; Madge looking over his shoulder, he makes an easel of large book on table.*)

BERTIE. Miss Blanchmayne, in the absence of a more eligible escort.

BABY. (*Eagerly.*) Oh, will you really? Come along; we are only going on the terrace, mamma; aren't we, Mr. Ffolliott?

(*They exit.*)

MAJOR. And now, Lady Blanchmayne, what is your opinion of this singular affair?

LADY B. I say that we will not put up with it. We must dispute the will.

MAJOR. Impossible!

LADY B. Why?

MAJOR. Because neither of us is related in a sufficiently close degree to inherit, and if the will were set aside the property would all go to the Crown!

LADY B. It is positively scandalous!

MAJOR. But, if we cannot act against this Mr. Blake we may act upon him.

LADY B. How?

MAJOR. This sudden stroke of fortune will turn the fellow's head.

LADY B. You think so?

MAJOR. I can read faces. He is a conceited ass.

LADY B. But what use can we make of his conceit?

MAJOR. The situation calls for absolute and reciprocal confidence. I will set the example by admitting that I am a ruined man.

LADY B. Well?

MAJOR. (*With meaning.*) He is decidedly good looking, this young Blake, and if he were taken in hand by a man of the world—really, my dear Lady Blanchmayne, he would be a superb match for any young lady.

LADY B. But these dreadful people he is connected with—this engagement which he has formed?

MAJOR. He can be taught to be ashamed of all that. A little clever handling is all that is required. I think we understand each other?

LADY B. (*Giving him her hand.*) Pray call my daughter back!

MAJOR. With pleasure.

(*Exit Major, to return almost immediately with Baby, followed languidly by Bertie.*)

SMYLIE. (*Coming down with Noel.*) The suddenness and short duration of Sir Richard's illness has left his affairs in a somewhat confused state, I am afraid. It would perhaps facilitate the preparation of a clear statement if I had your permission to go through the mass of papers and documents which are at present locked up under my seal.

NOEL. By all means; I place the room entirely at your disposal.

(*Enter Mrs. Bunn.*)

SMYLIE. Oh, this is the housekeeper, Mr. Blake; I have no doubt she is anxious to see her new master!

BUNN. (*To Noel, curtseying.*) Wishing you joy, sir, I'm sure. And perhaps you would like to see the house.

NOEL. Yes, of course we will go over the house. Come, Madge, I want you to speak to the housekeeper at once, and — (*Going.*)

LADY B. One moment, I beg, Mr. Blake. During our interview yesterday at your studio a slight misunderstanding arose between us, which I am anxious to repair. I asked your wife, then as I supposed, to accept a little souvenir—will you allow me now to offer it to your betrothed?

MAJOR. (*Aside.*) Bravo! (*Rubbing Hands.*) The thin edge of the wedge!

NOEL. (*Flattered.*) You are too kind!

JACK. (*Aside.*) What is her ladyship up to now, I wonder?

LADY B. Baby, come here, my dear child. (*Takes Locket from her neck.*)

BABY. Oh, mamma, you are not going to give my locket to that girl!

LADY B. (*Bringing Madge down—to Baby.*) Hush! Will you allow me, my dear Miss Haskett, to fasten my daughter's little locket round your neck?

MADGE. (*Surprised.*) You are very good, but—

JACK. (*Aside.*) There is something under this sudden burst of amiability.

LADY B. (*Putting chain on Madge's neck.*) It has no value beyond what you may please to attach to it. But I hope it may prove a bond of friendship between you and my little girl.

MADGE. (*With simple kindness.*) Will you let me be your friend, Miss Blanchmayne?

BABY. Yes; but my locket. (*Lady B. Pinches her.*) Oh, yes, of course; I shall be delighted. (*The girls go up together.*)

NOEL. On a day like this, Lady Blanchmayne, your kindness is doubly kind.

MAJOR. (*Half aside to Lady B., and watching Noel.*) A master-stroke, my Lady. Now it is my turn. (*Sighs deeply.*) Come, my dear Lady B., it is really time for us to be thinking of taking our leave.

NOEL. You are going already?

LADY B. Yes; there is nothing to detain us further at Field Royal. (*Sighs.*)

MADGE. But you have only just arrived, and Miss Blanchmayne is so tired.

NOEL. My cousin is right. In our excitement we were forgetting. Indeed, we should hardly have ventured to suggest; but now—

JACK. (*Carelessly.*) It's too late for you to set out to-day; you had much better remain here for the night at least. You can consider yourselves in Sir Richard's house if you like.

LADY B. I really don't know whether I ought.

NOEL. As you are generous enough to forgive my good fortune, I am sure you are too good to wish to humiliate me by a refusal of my hospitality.

JACK. (*To Madge.*) Listen to the rascal. Talks like the hero of a fashionable novel.

MAJOR. Well, well, Lady Blanchmayne; let us accept Mr. Blake's invitation, if only for the oddity of the thing. It will be a good joke to see the relations who are disinherited in the character of guests to the strangers who inherit.

LADY B. If you really think so, Major—

NOEL. Thank you; believe me I feel the honor deeply.

(*Enter Withers.*)

NOEL. What do you want?

WITHERS. I have come to take my new master's orders.

NOEL. Oh, you are the steward. I remember. Well, I wish you to—

MADGE. (*Taking him aside.*) Dear Noel you will not be angry with me if I beg a favor, the first I have ever asked?

NOEL. (*Patronizingly.*) Angry, my dear child? Certainly not.

MADGE. Then, as it is to Jack that we owe our happiness, and in return for the many sacrifices he has made in our behalf, will you ask him to give the first order in our new home?

NOEL. Well, of course the servants will naturally look to me for instructions; but since you wish it, my dear girl, and for this once— (*To Withers.*) I must refer you to this gentleman, Mr. Beamish, for the present.

JACK. (*Closing sketch-book and standing up.*) To me! (*Music.*)

NOEL. (*In a patronizing tone.*) Yes, dear old boy, I wish you to give the first order in my—in our new home.

(*Withers, turning to Jack and bowing with old-fashioned respectfulness.*)

WITHERS. What can I do for you, sir?

(*Jack, putting hands in pockets and looking triumphantly at Major and Lady B.*)

JACK. Send me my dog.

Curtain falls.

NOTE.—For call, let Van be discovered in Jack's arms



ACT III.

SCENE: Gardens of Field Royal prepared for a Fête; Exterior of House, etc., etc; Tent at back; (Music;) Bertie on Verandah in Easy Chair Smoking. Baby Enters slowly in Garden dress and hat!

BABY. (not seeing Bertie) Mamma saw Mr. Blake crossing the lawn just now, and she says I am to meet him here accidentally, and keep him until she comes. I hate Mr. Blake? Mamma thinks it is wicked of me, because he is so rich, but I can't help it. I do hate him, and his great stupid house, and the color of his hair, and the way he looks at me, and everything. (Sits down.) If Bertie would only ask me, I would run away. But he won't! He says he is too poor to marry me now—as if I cared for that! I knew a girl once who married a curate, and he used to wear carpet slippers, and they had tea and shrimps every day at six o'clock. because they couldn't afford to dine, and they were so happy! I wouldn't mind living on tea and shrimps with Bertie—no, not one bit. And I could work his slippers myself, so that need not cost anything, but if he won't suggest it, I can't be expected to beg. Oh, dear me! why do poor people ever fall in love?

(Enter Noel.)

NOEL. Miss Blanchmayne! and dressed so early, this is a delightful surprise.

BABY. Yes isn't it? That is what Mamma did it for. She made me run the pins into my fingers dreadfully, so as to be in time to meet you, and then I came here, quite by chance of course.

NOEL. And what a charming Toilette! I am afraid you have laid yourself open to a great many unamiable remarks from my fair guests to day. A woman may forgive another for being prettier than herself, but never for being better dressed.

BABY. Oh, you do like my dress then? It would have been an awful waste of money if you had not! Mamma, said she might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and that as Mme. Elise's bill was so long already, that one more item could not make much difference; could it Mr. Blake?

NOEL. If I had my will. Miss. Blanchmayne, flowers should bloom under your feet all the year round;

BABY. That would be very nice really! I like flowers especially artificial ones for ball dresses, but it wouldn't be much use towards paying bills. would it? and even tea and shrimps cost money Mamma says.

NOEL. Mamma must talk prudence now and then to pretty daughters.

BABY. I wish it was only now, and then; Mamma is always saying I cause her rest uneasiness, Mr. Blake

NOEL. (Sentimentally.) A piece of cruelty, Miss Blanchmayne, is guilty of in the case of another person I could name.

BABY. She says I shall end by marrying some fool or other, and yet that is just what she herself wants me to begin by doing, isn't it now, Mr. Blake?

BERTIE. (Aside rising from chair to verandah.) I don't think Baby will beat that remark, if she tries for a week.

(Coming down.)

BABY. Shall I have to sit out the Concert this afternoon. Mr. Blake? Mamma has forbidden me to fall asleep, because you composed so many of the pieces. (Starting as Bertie approaches.) Good gracious, Bertie, I mean Mr. Ffolliott, how you started me! and how delicious that cigarette does smell! I wish I could smoke! It makes a man look so wise when he has got nothing to say!

BERTIE. Miss Heskett, allows me to fumigate her flowers occasionally. You don't smoke, Blake?

NOEL. I? no—not much—that is— (Aside.) What the deuce does he want here now?

BABY. (Irritably) I think a man who does not smoke looks so ridiculous, doesn't he, Mr. Blake?

NOEL. Oh, when I say that I don't smoke much, I mean—

BERTIE. That you smoke a great deal? to be sure. (Aside.) Strikes me the conversation is beginning to languish, I am evidently not a success as Gooseberry. (Going.) Poor little Baby! She ought to have more sense than to make faces over the common lot! The very common lot one might say. (Fading.) If one could ever be rude to a millionaire!

(Exit.)

BABY. (*Half crying.*) There now, he's gone ; and I suppose I shall not see him again all day.

NOEL. I have ventured to send you a bouquet, Miss Blanchmayne, which I think will harmonize with your costume. I selected the flowers myself.

BABY. (*Looking after Bertie indifferently.*) Oh, thank you, I'm sure.

NOEL. And if, in return, I dare ask you to give me one?

BABY. (*Still looking off.*) I should have to do it, of course, mamma would make me.

NOEL. Then grant me that rose which you have worn for an hour, and I will keep it and treasure it for life!

BABY. Which, this? (*Taking it hurriedly from her dress without looking at him and holding it out.*) Here it is. Oh, you need not thank me for it, you can take it as a present from mamma

NOEL. It is given by your hand, at least! (*Takes flower and is about to kiss her hand when Jack enters followed by Mrs. Bunn.*) Confound it. I believe every soul in the house has selected this spot as their place of rendezvous to-day, (*Goes up with Baby.*)

JACK. (*Aside.*) I could have sworn he was kissing that girl's hand. It must have been my fancy.

MRS. B. Yes, sir, I sent the order to town last week, as you desired, and the things came down this morning, and beautiful they look, to be sure.

JACK. And you had money enough?

MRS. B. Lord bless you, yes, and to spare!

JACK. That's all right. Then you must accept what is left to buy yourself something splendid in caps. I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Bunn.

MRS. B. Don't mention it, sir, goodness knows it's a pleasure to do anything for you or for the young lady and after your many favors to me.

JACK. Oh nonsense! Run off with you, like a good old soul, and mind you keep dark now ; do you hear?

MRS. B. Never fear me, Mr. Beamish. I would not spoil sport, not for twenty new caps! (*Exit.*)

JACK. (*Looking at Noel and Baby.*) Well, what the deuce Noel can find to talk about to that little goose I can't conceive! After Madge's bright face and dear little womanly ways, I suppose it is his business to do the polite to his guests ; but, by Jove, I don't envy him the privilege in the present instance!

(*Noel and Baby come down.*)

BABY. (*With an air of relief.*) Oh, here is Mr. Beamish! I suppose I may go now; mayn't I, Mr. Blake? Mamma didn't say I was to amuse him, you know; did she?

JACK. (*With point.*) And yet, Miss Blanchmayne, you do.

BABY. (*Aside.*) I can see Bertie on the lawn still. (*Hurriedly.*) When mamma comes you will tell her I did talk to you for a long time, won't you, Mr. Blake? (*Runs off.*)

JACK. Well, old fellow, you deserve a medal from the Humane Society, and no mistake.

NOEL. What do you mean?

JACK. That your daily efforts to rescue that poor little brainless soul for a time from mamma's terrible clutches can only be prompted by the sublimest heroism on your part.

NOEL. (*Stiffly.*) I find Miss Blanchmayne a very agreeable girl; she may not be particularly clever.

JACK. (*Drily.*) No.

NOEL. But she is a lady born and bred. It would do Madge no harm, let me tell you, if she had a little of Miss Blanchmayne's refinement.

JACK. Nor Miss Blanchmayne if she had a little, a very little, of Madge's heart and brain! Are we to be favored much longer with the presence of your noble friends?

NOEL. I hope so. Lady Blanchmayne, hearing that my cousin had no female relations of her own living, has kindly proposed to remain at Field Royal as chaperon to Madge.

JACK. Chaperon to Madge! Why, what harm could come to our girl with that jolly old Bunn in the house? I'm sure she is respectable enough, and big enough to frighten away a whole regiment of dragoons.

NOEL. (*Impatiently.*) You don't understand. People who are in society must conform to its rules.

JACK. In society? Ah, to be sure, I forgot that you had the honor of dining at the Duchess of Fitz Battleaxe's last week.

NOEL. An honor which I owe to Lady Blanchmayne. Thanks to her influence, I have been received by the best set in the county, and the Duchess herself is to grace my first garden party to-day with her presence.

JACK. Life can have nothing better in store for us, after that! And the Major? Is his company also necessary to the respectability of our house?

NOEL. (*Cololy.*) The Major remains at my request. Is there anything else you would like to ask?

JACK. I'm dumb. Don't let me keep you from your friends any longer.

NOEL. (*Irritably.*) Look here, Jack! Do you intend to wear that suit of clothes for the rest of your life? (*Going.*)

JACK. I'm afraid not. I shall have to think of ordering another in course of a year or two!

NOEL. Can't you see that Lady Blanchmayne is always making a butt of you? Your manner of dressing is highly unsuitable. It is worse than that—it is positively indecent.

JACK. Indecent! May I ask, how I offend her Ladyship's fine modesty?

NOEL. Even the very servants—

JACK. Oh!—your servants object to my old shooting jacket, do they? What a hear-rending idea!

NOEL. How can they be supposed to respect a man who wears such clothes?

JACK. By Jove! It's lucky for me they see me occasionally in the society of such a swell as their master! Is that suit your own idea?

NOEL. Whose else should it be?

JACK. Waistcoat and all? Allow me to congratulate you.

NOEL. I've ordered one just like it for you.

JACK. For me! No—no—spare me, I implore!

NOEL. I might have known what your answer would be. (*Going.*) Ah, by the way! I wish you'd look after that dog of yours a little better?

JACK. What dog?

NOEL. Van, of course, you know very well!

JACK. (*Hurt.*) You might say our dog, I think!

NOEL. Lady Blanchmayne found him on an easy chair in her boudoir to-day, and she had hard work to drive him off it.

JACK. Poor old Van; he thinks he is still in the old garret at home, where the furniture was not too fine to be used.

NOEL. He'd be just as well off in the stables here.

JACK. I dare say, but he'd be putting on airs, if he mixed much with your servants. No, I will find a place for him in my own room.

NOEL. Have it your own way!

(*Enter Madge with flowers in her hat.*)

As usual, Madge! wandering about all alone. I wish you would learn to be less independent. Why could you not have taken a quiet stroll in the garden with Miss Blanchmayne, as other young ladies do? What the deuce will people think, if they see you running wild about the place like that?

JACK. That her lungs and limbs are in an excellent condition. What else could they think?

MADGE. (*To Noel.*) I did mean to ask Miss Blanchmayne to go with me, dear, but I saw you talking together as I crossed the garden, and—(*about to put button hole which she had been trying on Noel's Coat—*)

NOEL. (*Angrily.*) What the deuce has that got to do with it?

MADGE. Nothing, dear, of course, but—Oh, you have a flower already. I see!

NOEL. (*makes an impatient movement, the flowers fall to the ground*) Yes, yes; here it is close upon the hour for these people to arrive, and you are not dressed yet.

MADGE. (*with comical distress.*) Now, do you hear that, Jack! And I in all the glory of my fre-hest muslin gown; not dressed indeed, Sir, what more do you want, I should like to know?

JACK. (*Aside.*) Brave, little heart!

(*He picks up the fallen flower unseen, wipes the dust from it, and puts it in his breast pocket.*)

Well, I'll go and have a quiet weed by way of bracing myself for my plunge into society. (*Exit.*)

NOEL. Upon my soul Madge, I think you might show a little more regard for appearances,

MADGE. (*Sighing.*) I am sorry, dear. I did my best, but I am afraid, if I were even as smart as Miss Blanchmayne herself, I should still look out of place among so many fine people.

NOEL. Why do you talk like that? and why do you look so miserable?

MADGE. (*Trying to smile.*) I am not miserable, dear, indeed.

NOEL. Yes, you are. You have been as mute as a mouse, and kept us all at a distance.

MADGE. (*Gently.*) Perhaps, Noel, it is you who leave me at a distance.

NOEL. Oh, of course, of course it is I who am to blame. My dear Madge, you can surely understand the necessity of my making some friends for myself.

MADGE. Have we not got friends already, Noel? Why should you not send for our old companions to share in our good fortune? I wish poor Warrington and his wife could come to us for awhile. The country air and generous living would set him up again, poor fellow!

NOEL. That sort of thing was all very well in our struggling days.

MADGE. But what has changed, except that you are rich? Is the world less beautiful? Is art less noble, or less worthy the devotion of your life?

NOEL. (*Impatiently.*) This is all beside the question, we were talking of Lady Blanchmayne and her daughter, and I repeat I wish you would show a little more anxiety to return their advances.

MADGE. I feel ill at ease with them, dear; and besides, I like to keep Jack company. He is so lonely here.

NOEL. Oh, Jack! Let Jack growl in his corner like a great bear if he chooses.

MADGE. You think me shy and awkward, Noel, I am afraid?

NOEL. A little, I confess. It is not your fault, of course, but—

MADGE. (*Swallowing her tears.*) You did not think so once!

NOEL. Perhaps not, but your condition has changed since then. Let me see that you make some attempt to adapt yourself to that change.

MADGE. Ah, dear! I am afraid I shall find that very hard. I am shy and awkward. You told me so yourself, just now, and I do not think I shall ever be anything else. The poor girl who knocked at your door in London one winter day, with her little bundle under her arm, will never make a fine lady.

NOEL. (*Impatiently.*) You are a foolish child! Luckily I have common sense enough for both of us. Are you going?

MADGE. (*Pressing her tears.*) Yes; I—I am not well—I—

(*Exit, meeting Major, who raises his hat elaborately.*)

MAJOR. I hope it is not I who drove Miss He-kett away?

NOEL. You cannot think so, Major, for one moment.

MAJOR. I am afraid I have not the honor of pleasing your cousin, my dear Blake! By the way, there is nothing serious in this engagement between you, I trust? Forgive the seeming impertinence, but I am interested in you, and I think it only the duty of a friend to remind you that, though you were at perfect liberty to marry for love, as people say, while you were a struggling artist, a man in your present position owes a certain duty to society, and is not justified in throwing himself away.

NOEL. Not if he has given his word.

MAJOR. Absurd! How can the possessor of an estate like Field Royal, and an income of £30,000 a year be called upon to fulfil the promises made by Noel Blake, the penniless composer? Why, you have educated, kept, protected your cousin since her childhood, as far as I understand. She owes you everything.

NOEL. That is true, but—

MAJOR. My dear fellow, I understand your feelings thoroughly. It is not love for your cousin which induces you to bind yourself to the fulfilment of a thoughtless promise, but a feeling of false delicacy, which is, of course, highly creditable to you, and so forth, but is at the same time, in my opinion, wholly thrown away.

NOEL. (*Piqued.*) No, no; there you are wrong. I believe Madge to be devotedly attached to me, and I feel sure that any rupture between us would break her heart.

MAJOR. If young ladies have hearts. Nonsense, my dear fellow. Take my advice. Put an end to this entanglement at once. Make your cousin a present of a little wedding portion with which to bless some fortunate fellow later on, and you may, if you play your cards well, marry Lady Blanchmayne's daughter before the year is out.

NOEL. (*Suddenly.*) Lady Blanchmayne has asked you to propose this?

MAJOR. (*Calmly.*) What if it were so? which I do not, however, admit—the match

is in every respect a desirable one, and society will appreciate your manner of making restitution, as it were, of Sir Richard's bequest, to his legitimate heirs.

NOEL. But Miss Blanchmayne's affections appear to me to be already engaged.

MAJOR. Mere girlish folly! The little thing is pretty; so much the better for you—and a trifle silly, you will add; but what of that? In giving you her hand she will raise you to her own level, socially and as her husband you will be accepted by the best people in the county. Think it over, my dear Blake, think it over.

(Noel goes up moodily, where he is presently met by Withers. Enter Lady B, 1st entrance, meeting Major.)

LADY B. Well, my dear Major, I see you have returned to the attack.

MAJOR. Yes, and I believe I have made some slight impression. Or, rather, I have strengthened the impression already produced by your daughter's charms. (Bowing.) I am afraid, however, our host suspects a plot.

LADY B. No matter. Our strongest card is yet to be played. You have the Dutchess's letter safe?

MAJOR. Ready for production at the critical moment. Her letter really gives us a famous helping hand without intending it, thanks to her inordinate pride and vulgarity.

LADY B. Yes, what a letter! If it were not for Mr. Beamish and his delicate innuendoes, I should look upon the affair as settled. Can nothing be done to send that very meddlesome person back to his paint-pots?

(They go up conversing as Noel comes down on the other side with Withers.)

WITHERS. Then you do not desire to have any changes made in the decorations, sir?

NOEL. No; why do you ask?

WITHERS. Mr. Beamish thought that perhaps a few of his pictures in the music-room—

NOEL. (Angrily.) He seems to think he is in his own house, by Jove! I must not have a single picture on the walls but Sir Richard's portrait. You can go, and see that I am not annoyed further on the subject. (Withers bows and exits.) Beamish has cost me enough already. By Jove, when I think of it! £1,000 out of my money for a single picture, and by an unknown man! It was a lucky day for him when he fell in with me.

(Lady Blanchmayne comes down.)

LADY B. You are just in time, Mr. Blake. The Major and I have been admiring your arrangements for this afternoon. Really they are worthy of royalty—if it were not for one thing.

NOEL. And that is—?

LADY B. Must I mention it? It is hardly worth while.

NOEL. But I beg. My house still lacks, you say—?

LADY B. A gentleman to do the honors. Sir Richard left his work unfinished, my dear Mr. Blake. To a man like you, wealth is not sufficient, and until you have added position and social consideration to fortune, you will be like a column without a capital.

NOEL. And this position you consider would be best attained by intermarriage with a noble family? (With meaning.) Major Whyte has already recommended that step with very disinterested ardor.

LADY B. Major Spott Whyte is a man of the world, and his opinion is well worth taking on all such matters.

NOEL. The major is very kind to interest himself in me. But, really, I do not see that my position needs strengthening at present. The society you have introduced me to has already accepted me on my merits. My wealth, my reputation as a composer, insure the continuance of their favor. So that I really do not see why I should sacrifice my liberty, when I already possess all the advantages which a noble marriage could bestow on me.

LADY B. There is a great deal of truth in your argument. Have you seen that naughty child of mine? Ah, there she is with Mr. Froliott. What it is to be a mother! (Aside.) The Dutchess's letter must do the rest; if that fail— (Exit.)

(Major comes down and they exit together.)

NOEL. I think I have given her Ladyship to understand that I am not to be imposed upon.

(Re-enter Jack.)

JACK. The Major and her Ladyship appear to be in high feather about something. (Looking after them.) Noel, perhaps you will be interested in the fact that my

reverence for your Duchess has prevented me from smoking once to-day! My mouth is as fresh as a rose. I shall have the butterflies lighting on my moustache by mistake.

NOEL. Thank Heaven you are getting a little more civilized!

JACK. I say, this will be a tremendously swell affair, won't it? Lord! Lord! who would have thought, when we were living in that blessed old attic at home, that in a few months you would be settled on your own estate and giving a party to all the nobs of the neighborhood?

NOEL. (*Annoyed.*) Oh, I don't know; more surprising things have happened before now.

JACK. Not much, I think; not much. Look here, Noel, shall I have to dance?

NOEL. Dance? No! What the deuce put that into your head?

JACK. Thank Heaven! And yet, what rapture I should have experienced in encircling the fair waist of her Ladyship with my arm, or rather with my arms—one would not go round. (*Bus. dancing round, etc.*)

NOEL. Oblige me by letting Lady Blanchmayne alone.

JACK. Is her Ladyship an archangel, or what, that I am to be denied the mild privilege of laughing at her?

NOEL. While she is under my roof, I beg you to consider her one, at any rate.

JACK. (*Gravely*) Why, you're serious.

NOEL. Well, you annoy me beyond endurance. You seem to be prejudiced against all people of rank.

JACK. No, only against fools and rogues. But hush—here comes the first of the swells, I believe. (*Looking off.*)

NOEL. (*Eagerly.*) Already! (*With changed tone.*) No, it is only Madge

JACK. Only! Only Madge! Bless the child, how pretty she looks in her finery! (*Aside, sighing*) But what is that hope, Jack Beamish? (*Goes up.*)

(*Madge runs on in elegant toilet, with bouquet etc.*)

MADGE. (*Delightedly to Noel.*) Oh, you dreadful impostor! Now I know the meaning of the long scolding you gave me this morning! It made me a little bit unhappy at the time—I don't mind confessing that now—and I ran away to have a good cry in my own room. But there, the first thing I saw was my beautiful new gown all spread out on the bed, bouquet and all, and Mrs. Bunn, beaming with smiles, ready to dress me. Look, Jack! (*Turning round and holding out skirts.*) Did you ever see any thing in such perfect taste?

NOEL. (*Embarrassed*) I don't understand. I—

MADGE. (*Gaily.*) Oh, no, of course not. But you are not going to deceive me again, sir, I can tell you! (*Tenderly and lowering her voice*) Dear, dear Noel, you have made me so proud and glad you do not know! I cannot tell you all your thoughtful kindness means to me just now. (*Shyly*) If you were to ask me to pay you, I don't think I should say no.

NOEL. (*Not heeding the suggestion.*) But there is some mistake here. Of course I should have been very glad to provide you with a dress if I had known you had required one, but to tell you the truth it did not occur to me.

MADGE. (*Drawing back, wounded and surprised.*) Then it is not a present from you?

NOEL. I know nothing about it, really.

MADGE. (*Dejectedly.*) And I was so happy!

(*Jack turns up stage, whistling and looking at flowers, etc., with carefully acted indifference. Madge's eye falls on him, and her face instantly changes. Going straight to Jack, she lays her hands on his.*)

MADGE. Thank you, Jack! (*Her voice choked with emotion.*) Forgive me for not understanding sooner. I ought to have known.

JACK. (*Moved.*) What is that? Tears, Madge! Why, all the dresses in London are not worth such thanks as these. It is just as Noel says—he had not time to think of it, and so—

MADGE. (*Turning abruptly to Noel, with an effort to appear calm.*) And the other thing the money with which Mr. Bunn has supplied me since we have been here?

NOEL. I tell you, my dear, you could have had whatever you wished if you had only mentioned it. Of course, I took it for granted you would let me know.

MADGE. I understand, on'y Jack did not wait to be asked. At home, cousin, when I did my share of the daily work, and earned my little share of the money, I had no shame in telling you when I stood in need of a new gown, or of a pair of gloves. But here it is different, and I am sorry you do not feel so yourself—I—

(Turns up to hide her agitation as Baby enters carrying Noel's bouquet and followed by Bertie. Jack goes after Madge, consoling her and bringing her down, when they are met by Bertie. Noel advances to meet Baby.)

NOEL. You do my poor flowers too much honor, Miss Blanchmayne.

BABY. Oh, dear, no! If they were poor flowers I should not be carrying them at all, as you know very well; don't you, Mr. Blake? (*Jealously watching Bertie.*)

BERTIE (*Bowing to Madge.*) It is not Blake's wealth that men will envy him to-day, Miss Heskett.

MADGE (*Simply as she sees Noel with Baby.*) You mean they will admire Miss Blanchmayne? She does look very charming.

BABY (*Spitefully.*) Oh, no, indeed! Near Miss Heskett, it is not easy for any one to appear charming, is it, Mr. Ffolliott?

JACK. That's very true, very true, indeed. Still you don't look so badly yourself, considering.

NOEL (*Angrily aside to him.*) Beamish, will you hold your stupid tongue.

MADGE (*With an attempt at cheerfulness.*) And so, Jack, this is our first appearance in society.

JACK. It is. I am told the fashionable world is very much excited over my debut!

BABY. Indeed, if you think the Duchess, or anybody, will trouble their heads about you, Mr. Beamish, you are greatly mistaken; you haven't got the money, has he, Mr. Blake?

JACK. I did imagine so. Ah, Miss Blanchmayne, you have shattered one of the few illusions left me by a heartless and unappreciative world!

NOEL (*Looking at watch.*) Four o'clock and no one here yet. (*Walks about uneasily.*)

JACK (*Smothering a yawn.*) Going into the world is tremendously exciting work, I must say.

(*Servant enters with salver of ices, &c., and approaches Noel, who waves him angrily away.*)

NOEL. No, no!

JACK (*To servant, taking glass from tray; drinks.*) Who made this claret cup?

SERVANT. I don't know, sir.

JACK. I say, Noel, the claret cup is jolly weak.

NOEL. The devil take the claret cup.

JACK (*Putting it down.*) With all my heart! (*Exit servant.*)

BABY. It's awfully dull here, isn't it, Mr. Ffolliott? Suppose we all take a turn the lawn?

MADGE (*Rising.*) If you wish.

BERTIE. Am I permitted to accompany you?

(*The girls exeunt, followed by Ffolliott.*)

NOEL (*Looking at watch, again nervously.*) A quarter past and no one yet. It's very strange.

JACK. Do you know that it looks to me very much as if they didn't intend to come at all.

NOEL. Absurd! They could not all fail me. Besides, they would have sent excuse. I must see Lady Blanchmayne, and—(*Jack takes out cigar case.*) Are you going to smoke?

JACK. Not here; don't be afraid!

NOEL (*Excitedly.*) Not a soul! What on earth can be detaining them? Something must have occurred surely, I have not seen a paper to-day, but—

(*Enter Major, hurriedly, with open letter.*)

MAJOR. Bad news, my dear Blake, I regret to say—

NOEL. What is it!

MAJOR. Here is a letter which Lady Blanchmayne has just received, but I really don't know whether—

NOEL. Give it to me! I am prepared for the worst. (*Reads.*) "My dear Lady Blanchmayne: Does your mushroom millionaire intend to insult his betters, by inviting them to look at his ill-gotten splendor?"

MAJOR. Enough, enough, my dear Blake

NOEL (*Reads.*) "Does this, Mr. Blake imagine, because I consented, at your

request, to receive him civilly in my own house, that henceforth we are on terms of equality?"

MAJOR. There, there, my dear, Blake! Let me beg of you—

NOEL. (*Re-ads.*) "Advise him from me, to cultivate a little modesty. When a man has had the misfortune to compose a Symphony which has cost a noble family £30,000 a year, people will always consider his talent, whatever it may be, infinitely below the rate of his salary"—(*Gives letter back; a pause suddenly*) Major Whyte! I have decided. I authorize you to propose for Miss Blanchmayne in my name! But on one condition, that the engagement is kept secret for the present.

MAJOR. By all means! But, what's the use of delaying? You can see for yourself that Ffolliott is sweet on the girl.

NOEL. (*Scornfully*) Ffolliott, a beggarly clerk in an office! I don't think I have much to fear in that quarter.

MAJOR. Very good; meanwhile you can contrive to rid yourself of a certain entanglement we have spoken of, and we will take a run on the continent. I have the entrée of every continental court; I undertake to arrange the whole business for you and for my trouble, (*in an airy manner*), you shall make me, if you like, a little pecuniary acknowledgement on your wedding day.

NOEL. Agreed, name your own terms!

MAJOR. To-day, society has refused to attend the entertainment given by Noel Blake, in a few months it shall be begging for invitations from Lady Blanchmayne's son-in-law!

(*Exit.*)

NOEL. Oh, the delight of repaying the insolence of these people a hundred fold! Let me, but once, get my foot upon their necks, and they shall feel what it is to be humiliated.

(*Enter Jack.*)

Oh, there you are! There will be no one here to-day, so you can smoke to your heart's content.

JACK. But—is anything wrong? How wild you look, lad!

NOEL. No, no; why do you ask? What should be wrong, but, I have no time now to explain.

(*Rushes off.*)

JACK. (*Dolefully.*) Deuce take the money! Rich people have always something else to think of besides being happy! Oh, for an hour of the old free and easy life! Oh, for my ragged old blouse smelling of tobacco, and my slippers and pipe, and glass! Oh for a good laugh at Horngold's chaff, or the friendly sound of Smythe's abominable strains! Oh, for—(*Musical.*)

(*Smythe is heard singing outside.*)

Halloa! What do I hear? Surely, no one but Sebastian himself was ever guilty of such a musical or unmusical phrase as that. Egad, I believe my wish is going to be realized as soon as uttered.

(*Goes up eagerly. Smythe enters and rushes into his arms extravagantly with a prolonged howl of delight.*) (*Music Stops.*)

SMYTHE. My friend! my chief! my hero! Do we then meet again at last?

JACK. You may well say "at last," why the deuce have you never answered my letters, or run down to see me? But no matter, we've got you now, and we shall not let you go in a hurry!

SMYTHE. Too generous being! This heart is absolutely tropical! Oblige me by leading me to the nearest fountain, and leaving me in it. (*Sits down, but jumps up to embrace his friend once more.*)

JACK. We Haven't any fountains handy just now, but what do you say to a nice cool champagne cup under the trees? (*Goes up rushing about eagerly*) Here Withers! James! Somebody!

(*Enter servant, to whom he gives orders and servant exits.*)

(*Jack comes down again. Smythe rises and salutes him with a series of mock respectful bows.*)

SMYTHE. Pardon me, Mr. Beamish! If I had known that you were in a position to address a livery like that in such familiar terms, I would have treated you

with the respect such a position merits. Allow me to repair my error without delay and— (*Jack pushes him back into seat affectionately*)

JACK Sit down, you jolly old ass, and tell me all the news! Lord! Lord! How glad our little Madge will be to see your ugly old phiz again! And wait until you see her, Sebastian! She's prettier and sweeter than ever!

SMYTHE By jove! and Van? How does the old rascal like his new quarters, eh? Does he get you into as much trouble as of old? Egad, its throwing temptation in his way to let him loose among such calves as those—isn't it? (*Indicating servant who is entering with tray.*)

JACK. Ay, poor o'd boy! But the Flunkeys take care to give him, and his master a wide berth! (*To servant*) What's this? Champagne, Ices—that's all very well. But look sharp now, and bring us something a little more substantial, do you hear? (*Business during this for Smythe, of suppressed admiration of the footman's splendour.*)

JACK Some raised pie, and lobster salad, and anything you like so long as you don't keep us waiting half an hour!

(*Servant exits to return during following dialogue with luncheon tray which he sets on small table front.*)

SMYTHE. By Jupiter! you are in clover here, and no mistake! and Noel! you don't speak of him. I suppose he is as happy as the day is long—working away at the opera which is to excel even the famous Symphony itself? What a career that fellow has before him, thanks to the vitiated taste of a brainless public, which—

JACK. (*Hastily filling Smythe's glass.*) Etcetra! Etcetra Try the champagne, o'd man! And how are all the boys, eh? Horngold and Teddy, and Warrington? By Jove! How I long to see them all again!

SMYTHE. Ah! thanks to you Jack, Warrington is on his legs again. He charged me with all sorts of grateful messages, and—

JACK. (*Interrupting.*) Yes, yes, all right! a little of the pie—(*helping him*) Of course the poor fellow's illness has left him awfully hard up, but you can tell him from me not to worry about the needful until he is thoroughly able for work again. Noel has a jolly idea in his head about him, and so we'll drink to his better fortune. (*They drink.*) And, you know, Sebastian, if there is anything in the world I can do for you—

SMYTHE. You are a trump, Jack Beamish, and I have not waited till to-day to find it out. But at present, thank my lucky stars, the blind Goddess smiles upon the humble votary at the shrine of Harmony. In other words, I have secured the six flaxen-haired daughters of a butcher in Tottenham Court Road as pupils, and— (*Taking pipe from pocket, and about to light it, when Madge enters at back.*) I say, Jack, there's a lady coming towards us in full sail, and I was nearly caught in the act of lighting up. (*Tries to hide pipe and assumes an air of elegant indifference. Madge seeing him—*)

MADGE. (*Utters a little cry of delight.*) Is it possible?

SMYTHE. Why, y all that is sacred, it is Madge—I mean, Miss Heskett!

MADGE. (*Rushing to him with outstretched hands.*) No, Madge—little Madge—you dear old Sebastian, who has lit that familiar black pipe for you many and many a time in Great Charlotte Street. Let me do it for you now, so that you may see I have not forgotten the way. (*Lighting it with match.*) Oh, Jack, isn't it like old times to see him again? I declare that horrible old meerschaum smells sweeter than all my lady's perfumes put together! When did you come, Mr. Smythe? Of course you are going to stay with us for some time? Where is your luggage? It must be sent for at once!

JACK. To be sure. I'll call Withers, and Sebastian shall give him his instructions in music.

SMYTHE. (*In arms at once.*) And why not? As if music were not sufficiently expressive to—

JACK. (*Laughing*) I see the old hobby-horse is as rampant as ever! I wonder he has not kicked you off long ago! (*Enter Withers.*) However, here is Withers, in the very nick of time Try it on.

SMYTHE. (*Gravely addressing Withers.*) My friend, will you be good enough to— (*Sings, ending with imitation of hen and chickens.*)

WITHERS. (*Shaking his head dubiously.*) I beg your pardon, sir!

JACK. (*Laughing.*) He doesn't see it Once more, Sebastian.

SMYTHE. (*Still blandly.*) I see you did not catch the notes. I repeat, will you be good enough to— (*Sings as before.*)

WITHERS. (*Struck with a bright idea.*) Oh, I see, sir. To be sure—you would like a little old roast Chicken? Certainly, sir. (*Going.*)

JACK. (*Laughing.*) Bravo, Smythe!

SMYTHE. (*Resignedly.*) Oh, these rustic numskulls? (*To Withers.*) I was merely requesting you in the plainest of terms to send for my portmanteau to the Hen and Chickens.

WITHERS. (*Respectfully*) I will do so, sir. If you had only said so at first, I should have understood you immediately. (*Goin'.*)

SMYTHE. (*Furious.*) The Goth! The idiot! Let me get at him! Let me chop him into demi-semi-quavers!

(*He rushes at Withers and plumps into the arms of Lady B, who enters, followed by Noel, Major, Bertie and Baby. Smythe stammers out an apology, and comes down with a rush to Jack and Madge, mopping his forehead and thoroughly nonplussed. Lady B. sourly regarding him through eyeglass.*)

LADY B. Another of Mr. Beamish's graceful jests, I feel sure. It is not enough that ladies are to be annoyed and terrified by his very objectionable dog, but now—Really, Mr. Blake, I begin to fear that we are tre-passing too long on your kindness. Your friends are evidently determined to make our longer stay at Field Royal impossible.

NOEL. (*With suppressed rage.*) Allow me to apologize in his name, Lady Blanchmayne. I will undertake to see that neither the dog nor any inmate of my house shall offer you any further annoyance after to-day.

MAJOR. Spoken like a gent eman.

NOEL. (*Advancing, meets Withers.*) Who is this person?

WITHERS. A friend of Mr. Beamish, sir. I am going to send to the village for his luggage.

NOEL. You will take that order from me, and from no one else. You may go. (*Exit Withers.*) Mr. Smythe, I think? I am very sorry, but the house is so full at present that I cannot ask for the pleasure of your company. I shall be happy to send you back to the station in one of my carriages. You will be in time for the six o'clock train to town.

JACK. Noel, are you mad?

MADGE. (*Indignantly.*) Mr. Smythe is here as Jack's guest. He brings us news of our old friends—friends who were good to you in our days of poverty.

NOEL. When Beamish has a house of his own to ask his friends to, I shall not question his choice of guests. I claim the same privilege in mine. Lady Blanchmayne, will you allow me? (*Offers his arm. They go up. Major takes snuff and surveys Smythe with languid curiosity, as he follows them. They converse at back. Then Lady B. exits with Major, and Noel comes down.*)

BERTIE. (*Curling moustache*) Your little millionaire is the most thorough-faced cad breathing, Miss Blanchmayre, do you know?

BABY. Is he, really? Well, I thought so myse'f, and you ought to be a judge of cad, oughtn't you, Mr. Ffolliott? (*They follow Lady B. off.*)

SMYTHE. (*Drawing a long breath.*) Somebody pinch me: The world is crumbling beneath my feet. Was it to me, Sebastian Smythe, those words were addressed?

JACK. Forget them, Sebastian, forget them, and the man who uttered them. He is not worthy of your anger. Go with Madge. I will not insult you by asking you to remain one moment longer within his gates. Go, and leave me with this man.

MADGE. Come, Mr. Smythe; Jack is right—come!

(*They go off.*)

JACK. (*To Noel.*) I want a few words with you.

NOEL. Then look sharp, will you?

JACK. Smythe brought me a message from Warrenton.

NOEL. Indeed?

JACK. He hasn't a sixpence in the world!

NOEL. Indeed?

JACK. So this will be a favorable moment for putting your intention on his behalf into execution.

NOEL. My intentions?

JACK. Yes. Ain't you going to send him £100?

NOEL. I? This is the first I have heard of it.

JACK. Then you must have a very short memory. Have you forgotten what you said to me that day in the studio at home? If ever I am rich I will have my Symphony performed in a theater of my own?

NOEL. Damn the Symphony!

JACK. And I will send £100 to poor Warrington and his hungry babies.

NOEL. (*Sneering.*) Only £100? Are you sure it was not £1,000?

JACK. (*Gravely.*) I only remember the £100.

NOEL. What with the legacies I have had to pay away, and one thing and another, I am a poorer man than yesterday. At any rate, I have not got £100 to fling out of the window.

JACK. Then Warrington must starve?

NOEL. Stuff and nonsense! Nobody does starve! If they have any talent, they can work and grow rich.

JACK. As you did? (*Madge enters, unperceived.*) Well, let us say no more about it. I will send the sum to Warrington out of my legacy. All Sir Richard's money has not fallen into bad hands. But I understand. I can read your thoughts plainly enough. You want to break with Warrington as you have broken with the rest of our old chums—with Smythe, who sold the coat off his back, when you were ill, to get you wine. You cannot associate any longer with a man whose father was a tradesman, like your own!

NOEL. (*Holly.*) Do you wish to humiliate me by recalling the fact?

JACK. No; I merely wish to remind you of it. But our pretty little Madge, the girl we have watched over so many years, and who made the joy of our home—what lady in the land could love you more, or rule your house and bear your name with better grace? Noel, be true to her! That is all I ask. Be true to Madge, and I will go back to the life I never should have left, and mar your prosperity no longer.

NOEL. I am neither of the age, nor in the humor, to stand this perpetual control of my actions.

JACK. Do you think that because you have grown wealthy, you can expect to escape the judgment of your friends?

NOEL. If what goes on here does not please you, you have the remedy in your own hands!

JACK, (*passing his hand in a bewildered fashion across his eyes.*) I have the remedy in my own hands!

(*Madge comes down pale and in tears.*)

Madge! my poor girl! you were there—and you heard?

MADGE. All, all—Ah, miserable girl that I am!

JACK. Don't cry, Madge, don't cry, dear!

MADGE. Oh, Jack! If my tears could wash out his black ingratitude! Cold, cruel as he has grown, I did not think that he would dare to speak such words to you; to you, who have made him what he is.

JACK. No, no, dear! you are mistaken. It was my fault principally, believe me it was.

MADGE. Coward, that I am! Why have I remained here so long! Oh, take me away, Jack! Take me away! Let me go back to the dear old home together!

JACK. Why, you silly little woman, what would Noel say to that? You know very well he loves you, and for the sake of your own happiness.

MADGE. My happiness! Has it not been slipping from me day by day, and hour by hour, since the moment we first came to this house? No, Jack, you feel as I do, that my poor little dream is over; and that Noel will soon learn to be ashamed of me, as he is already ashamed of his art and of his old friends.

JACK. Ashamed of you! If I believed that to be possible! But no, Madge, you wrong your lover, for he is your lover dear, and I will yet bring him back—I mean, not that he has ever left you of course, but—(*aside, with a groan.*) Oh, what a clumsy brute I am!

MADGE. Don't Jack—don't speak to me like that, I cannot bear it.

(*Suddenly takes his hands and covers them with kisses. Then breaks away and runs off.*)

JACK. (*Moved.*) I felt her tears upon my hands. Poor child; they made me start as if I had been stung. How she loves him! With a love that miserable fellow flings away like a withered flower. A love that would make the best and highest joy of other lives. Good God! To see happiness so near you, holding out her bountiful hands and smiling in your face, and not to dare to take her to your heart. (*Goes up.*)

(*Enter Major and Noel continuing conversation.*)

MAJOR. No time like the present. You surely must acknowledge the extreme desirability of the connection?

NOEL. Undoubtedly, and yet—

MAJOR. Hush! here comes Lady Blanchmayne with her charming daughter!

(Enter Lady B and Baby)

Talk of the angels, my dear Miss Blanchmayne, Mr. Blake was just loud in your praises.

JACK, (*al back.*) Noel, loud in her praises, what does this mean?

LADY B. And what has he been saying of my little girl, Major, if it is fair to ask?

NOEL, (*with an effort.*) The merest common places; that your daughter is as amiable as she is beautiful, and that her husband will be the happiest of men.

BABY. Indeed, you are quite mistaken, Mr. Blake. If I don't marry the man of my choice, I shall be perfectly horrid, and lead him a dreadful life, the way Mamma did poor Papa. Shan't I, Mamma?

LADY B. My dear!

(A shot is heard and a scream, Madge runs on pale and terrified and rushes to Jack. Servant follows with a Gun.)

MADGE. Oh, Jack, Jack! (*covers her face in her hands.*)

JACK. What is it?—who has dared to frighten you?

MADGE. Van—poor Van! (*Sobbing violently.*) Oh, why did they do it?

JACK. What of Van?

MADGE. He is dead, Jack—they have killed him! Didn't you hear the shot? (*shuddering.*)

(Jack rushing at Servant and seizing him.)

JACK. Is this true?

SERVANT. My master's orders, sir!

JACK, (*recoiling, releases man, and turns to Noel pale and stern.*) Does this fellow speak the truth? Was it by your orders?

NOEL. By my orders! I don't know what you mean?

MAJOR. (*Taking snuff.*) You know perfectly well my dear, Noel! Do not be afraid to acknowledge what you have done in your own house. You gave your people instructions to rid us of that odious beast, and you did perfectly right.

JACK, (*silences railing himself.*) Is that true?

NOEL. Well, yes; it is. What of it?

(Jack makes a rush towards him, but is checked by Madge.)

MADGE. Oh, Noel! Noel!

JACK. (*Stunned by the blow.*) He has killed the dog!—killed old Van!—shot him through his faithful heart, that was as tenderly devoted to a worthless master as my own. You were good for nothing but to love him, and you troubled his magnificence with your shabby presence as I do—as I do, too!

MADGE. Come away, Jack; come away with me. They will only sneer at you!

MAJOR. Oh, not at all! We can fully understand this devotion to a dog, who gave rise to such agreeable expectations!

JACK. It is not only for the dog I grieve. It is not he alone who is dead. The friendship which once filled my life has been murdered with the same foul blow! (*To Noel, with supreme contempt.*) The veil is torn away at last from before my eyes, and I can see down to the bottom of your shallow soul! Egotist! Ingrate! Coward!

NOEL. Beamish. (*Music till end of Act.*)

JACK. (*Fiercely.*) Silence! I have fed you, fed you with my bread, my hopes, my life. I have made of my talent a ladder for your genius to climb, if you had asked my heart's blood of me I should not have denied you. And how have you rewarded me? God forgive you, Noel Blake, you have reduced me to the infinite bitterness of flinging my own benefits in your teeth! You have taken my talents; you have been the end and consolation of all my sacrifices. I had nothing left in the wide world but my dog, and now you have even taken him! You shot the poor old dog that you might rid yourself of his master. Well, you have gained your point! But before I go you shall know the whole truth once for all! I love Madge! yes, I love her: you are incapable of loving anything outside your miserable self! and yet I have made no attempt to win her—the priceless pearl by which you set so little store—but have resigned her to you, as I resigned all other things a man could most desire. Be satisfied! From this day forth I will trouble you no more!

(Rushes off. Madge overcome with the declaration of Jack's love, falls half fainting into the arms of Mrs. Bunn, who has run on at sound of gun.)

Picture.—CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

SCENE: *The Studio; in the same state as when quieted by the occupants at end of Act 1st; Empty Grate, open Piano, litter of Music papers, e c., on floor. (Music.) Enter Jack, unloking door and closing it behind him; he pauses in middle of stage and looks around; goes up to window and throws it wide open; comes down and sits at table, with attitude of cheerfulness; then suddenly breaking down, buries his face on his folded arms; after a pause he recovers himself.*

JACK. So, here I am, at home again! Back in the old scenes to begin the old life once more. The old life; but how changed. By the hearth which friendship, hope and love shared with me a few months back. I must henceforth sit alone! *(Dejectedly, and rising to go and stand before his picture which still hangs on the wall.)* My picture! How often I have longed for the time when it should be finished. Shall I ever have the courage to go on with it? Can I ever hope to renew the colors with which which it was begun? The colors blended in such magic tints by youth and eager longing and ambition! *(Sighing and turning away.)* As well think to bring back my own careless self of a little while ago! *(Takes some trifle of lace or work from Midge's basket and holds it to his lips, passing his hand over his eyes with a kind of sob.)* There's where she used to sit, so busy and so bright, where I shall never see her sit again. No, never again shall I turn from my easel to watch the little figure in its straight gray gown, fitting about the room, the kindly spirit of our bachelor fireside. Poor child! Poor love! *(Turns away and pauses at the piano which is open. He stands with his hands thrust in his pockets and surveys it with a melancholy smile.)* Ay! he has taken everything—the music from the silent instrument—the very soul of my listless body, and he values them as much as one of these poor broken strings. Well the past is dead and buried! And here, upon the timeless notes her hand has touched, I lay my anger and revenge beside the past, and say I can forgive him for her sake. *(Closes lid of piano softly and stands lost in thought.)*

(Enter Teddy Sprott.)

TEDDY. What, Jack, back again! *(Shaking him warmly by the hand.)* I thought I heard somebody tramping about over my head, and I ran up to see if by any chance *(shaking hands again)*—Lord, how jolly it is to have you back! And—and Miss Heskett—is she with you?

JACK. No, Teddy, no! I am by myself!

TEDDY *(disappointed.)* Oh, going into the country again?

JACK. No, no! It's too long and too wretched a story to tell you just now, but I have left Field Royal forever!

TEDDY *(bewildered.)* Forever?

JACK. Haven't you seen Smythe? Hasn't he got back yet? Didn't he tell you?

TEDDY. Smythe! No! I say, this room looks jolly uncomfortable. Come down into mine and have some beer, and then you can tell me, if you like, what has happened!

JACK. I will; and then you can go round to Warrington's with me. I must see him to-night. *(Looking round room.)* How changed!

(They exeunt—Music.)

(A pause. Enter Midge in her dress of act 1st, followed by Mrs. Bunn, who carries a basket and a large umbrella, etc.)

MIDGE, *(in a loud whisper.)* Come in Mrs. Bunn, there's no one here!

(Mrs. Bunn enters looking about her with great curiosity, and elevating her hands in comfortable surprise.)

MRS. B. Dear! dear! dear! Miss Madge! What a queer little place to be sure?

MADGE, (*clasping her hands.*) But how glad I am to be back in it once more! Mrs. Bunn, I have been very happy here, though we were so poor!

MRS. B. Indeed my dear, and money doesn't always bring contentment as I well know! But Miss Madge, you can't stop here, I'm afraid we shall have to find rooms for ourselves at once, my dear!

MADGE Yes, I know! I intend to ask Mrs. Warrington to let us stay with her for the present. I could mind her little children, for she isn't very strong; but first I must see Jack, he is so unhappy, everyone has been so cruel to him.

MRS. B. Indeed then, and that is what Mr. Beamish does not deserve!

MADGE. And least of all from me, who should have known how to read that no' lest, tenderest of hearts! But I was as blind as all the rest. (*With a sudden recollection.*) You do not think I am too bold, dear old Bunn? You do not think Jack could misunderstand my presence here?

MRS. B. No, my dear; no! If he is in trouble where else should you be but here?

MADGE. (*Joyfully.*) Yes, yes, that is what I feel, and when I have explained why I came, we can go to Mrs. Warrington's at once, so that he could not think, he ought not to suppose. (*Suddenly clasping her hands and looking about her.*) The room is dreadfully untidy, Mrs. Bunn, and that will never do; suppose we put it in order? See, there is his picture. That shall be the very first that we touch. Quick, Bunn, quick, help me to lift it down. (*Bus.*) Now, let us put it on easel, so! (*She runs to the cupboard for cloth, and dusts it gently.*) See how the colors glow, now that the dust is gone! And it is months and months since he laid a brush on it—months of patient self-denial and devotion, of loneliness and misjudged suffering. Forgive me, Jack, forgive me! I was blind. I did not know. (*Forgetting Mrs. Bunn's presence she leans against picture, touching it with her lips, as she puts her arms across it.*)

MRS. B. No, don't you fret, my dear! That is a lover now, and Mr. Beamish will be as happy and as famous one of these days as he deserves to be.

MADGE. (*Starting up.*) Yes, pray heaven! we will not misunderstand him any more. (*Bustling about gently.*) There, there is his beloved old Blouse! (*Laying it on back of chair, near easel, and putting painting materials at hand, at a little distance, and admiring effect.*)

(*Clock strikes 6.*)

Six o'clock already! and I have not begun to get the supper ready. Oh, dear! Jack can't live on the thought of his picture, beautiful as it is; can he? Mrs. Bunn. Let us light the fire. It is not a very cold evening, but it will be such a welcome to him when he comes home. Jack always says that a fire in a room is like a river in a landscape. (*They bring wood, &c., and a fire is laid and lit as she speaks.*) And I think a kettle adds considerably to the effect at times! (*Pls kettle and puts it on fire.*) I wonder if Lady Blanchmayne ever saw a kettle in her life. I am afraid her ladyship would faint if she saw me put it on the fire with my own hands. There; now for the table-cloth and your basket of good things! (*They spread table during dialogue.*) There! a roast fowl, tongue, country butter, home-made bread, tea, sugar, etc. He will not expect such a banquet, will he? nor such agreeable society! And now, come along, dear Bunn, and I will show you the little bedroom where I used to sleep, and you shall put on that splendid cap, which I know you have brought with you, and be ready to pour out tea as soon as Jack comes home!

MRS. B. Dear! dear! Miss Madge! you will have your own way, I know! And, indeed, I shall feel more like myself when I get on my cap. (*Exit.*)

MADGE. (*Her feverish gaiety forsaking her and leaving her pale and nervous.*) He cannot be much longer! Oh, how my heart does beat! (*Sitting down at fire with work basket. The light shines redly on her.*) I will not light the lamp just yet. It will be easier to speak to him in the dusk. But what am I to say? Now that I am here my courage fails me. I am afraid. I have been foolish—rash. Better that Jack should never know what I came here to tell him than that I should sink one hair's breadth from the sacred place I hold now in his thoughts. (*Music.*) Better I should go away, and be forgotten! Hark! (*Listening nervously. Goes to door and listens.*) There he is—that is his step! And, oh! how dull, and slow, and spiritless it sounds. (*Goes back to her work, with her back to the door.*)

(*Jack enters slowly, flinging his hat wearily aside. Goes to table and strikes a match to light lamp. As it gradually brightens he notices the supper that has been laid and appears puzzled. Looks around place dubiously.*)

JACK. I must have mistaken the floor in the dark. (*Sees Madge's figure at the fire.*) I beg your pardon, really! I didn't mean to intrude!

(Lamp on full. He sees her face as she turns around.)

Madge! (*Rushing to her and looking in her face, to make sure that it is really she.*) Madge here! Why, child, what are you doing in this place? (MUSIC STOPS)

MADGE. (*Hanging her head and smiling.*) I—I am mending the stockings, Jack; they want it very badly.

JACK. You have come back. It is really you! In your pretty gray gown of the old days, too! You little witch! I see you have been waving your wand about the room already.

MADGE. Only a broomstick, Jack. That is the proper thing for a witch, you know!

JACK. You darling child! that blessed little broom has swept the cobwebs out of my poor brain already, as well as the dust from the floor. Oh, Madge! are you sure I am not dreaming, and have we really been away all this time, all this long miserable time?

MADGE. (*Demurely.*) You must have been somewhere sir, to learn such extravagant habits. (*Bringing Blouse from chair by Elsel.*) Are you going to wear that coat in the house—a beautiful new coat that you have only had for 10 years?

JACK. (*With returning joy.*) Yes, it is she—her very little self—come back to keep everything in order. (*Changes coat for blouse with her assistance.*) There, then, madame, I hope you are satisfied now, and prepared to tell me the meaning of that delightful little apparition by my hearth?

MADGE. (*Getting flurried.*) Of course, when I have made the tea, and—

JACK. The kettle is not boiling yet. Where have you been, Miss Heskett, that you have grown so aristocratic, and forgotten the rudiments of an art in which you used at one time to excel?

MADGE. (*With emotion.*) Where I should never have dreamt of going, Jack! Where no one wants me any longer; where I will never, never go again!

JACK. Madge!

MADGE. Yes, I will speak now, before I go away, and tell you all. Jack, everything is at an end between Noel Blake and me!

JACK. No, no!

MADGE. I have come to London to try and get a situation. I could teach little children, perhaps, or give music lessons, and sometimes I could see you all—Mrs. Warrington and Sebastian and Teddy, and—(*Getting more and more embarrassed*)

JACK. (*With bitter indignation.*) Did that man consent, then, to your coming here—alone on such business? Had he the heart to let you go?

MADGE. Oh, hush! He did not know of it! I could not see him after—after poor old Van's death and your going away. But nothing he could have said—if ever he had cared to say such words, would have kept me in that house another day. There is no room in it for me any longer!

JACK. Good God! That it should come to this!

MADGE, (*smiling tenderly.*) It is no such very hard fate, after all! I have good friends still, and my big brother to look after me a little now and then. Many a poor girl has to go out into the world, and earn her bread, without any such consolation and support.

JACK. Poor child! How will your tender little hands serve for that struggle with the cruel thing you call the world? Your little heart will break against its hard indifference and scorn? Madge—why should you talk of earning your own bread?

MADGE, (*trying to laugh.*) Because Bakers have a prejudice in favor of being paid for their loaves, I suppose, I—

JACK, (*earnestly.*) No—don't jest now with me, dear? But think of what I am going to say! Madge, you can trust me—can't you?

MADGE. Trust you!

JACK, (*with increasing agitation.*) Then why may it not be my pride and joy to make a home for you, my dear? A home which would be humble enough for awhile, but which would be your own at least, and sheltered from everything that could harm or hurt you!

MADGE. Jack?

JACK. I know that I am selfish to talk like this—so soon. But the thought of my little girl in London all alone is more than I can bear. The thought of your frail little feet struggling through wind and rain and snow, day after day to earn the miserable pittance that will barely keep body and soul together—of the hardship you must endure and the insult your very beauty will bring upon you. Oh, love! the first fruits of your love cannot be mine, I know, but may I hope for nothing else? I will be contented with so little, Madge. To work for you, to care for you, to give you of my best, that is all I ask. And surely dear, after a time, when you had once

proved the strength of my devotion—surely a heart so tender and so true as yours would find some little love to give me in return. I mean in time. I will be patient—Madge!

(*Madge about to speak passionately, when door is flung open, admitting Noel, who slams it behind him.*)

MADGE. Ah!

NOEL. I thought as much!

MADGE. You here?

JACK. I think you might have spared us this!

NOEL. (*Curly.*) I want no words with you at all. I am here to take my cousin back, though perhaps she is hardly worth the pains. A girl who is so utterly lost to all self-respect as to follow a man to his rooms, at this hour, and alone—

(*Mrs. B. entering from bedroom quick'y.*)

MRS. B. No, sir; not alone. (*Pause*) Miss Heskett is here under my protection, if you please.

NOEL. (*Furiously.*) My housekeeper in revolt, too! What next? This is all very fine. (*To Mrs. B.*) But you have mistaken the man you have to deal with. Return at once to your duties. You are in my service, not in Miss Heskett's, please to remember.

MRS. B. No, sir, asking your pardon, I have always been accustomed to gentlemen's houses, and I am no longer in your service. Indeed, sorry am I that I ever remained in it for a day! (*Curtseying stiffly and turning away towards fire, where she bueies herself in making tea, etc.*)

NOEL. (*Abruptly to Madge.*) Why have you left Field Royal?

MADGE. You ask me why?

NOEL. I do. That is your home. It is my place as your only relative to protect you against evil advisers, and I desire you to return.

MADGE. And I refuse!

NOEL. Refuse?

MADGE. Yes; I have felt many a day that I stood in the way of your advancement in the world you have chosen. And there was a time when the knowledge caused me the bitterest grief a woman's heart can feel. But now—

NOEL. What now?

MADGE. I know you. The past is at an end forever. I ask nothing of you henceforth but to let me go my way in peace.

NOEL. Absurd! If any nonsensical jealousy has prompted this step, I must say you have chosen a highly unbecoming manner of showing it. Why should you take it for granted that I did not intend to fulfil my promise? A girl for whom I am still prepared to make such sacrifices!

MADGE. (*Proudly.*) You shall make none for me.

NOEL. Do come! come! I can forgive some natural annoyance at my attentions in another quarter; but if your love is not proof against such trifles—

MADGE. (*Sad'y.*) My love! That girlish love by which you set so little store is cold and dead! It perished in the same hour with Jack's—your benefactor's—friendship!

JACK. Madge!

NOEL. (*In a jealous rage.*) You are saying what you will repent some day.

MADGE. (*Passionately*) Never! I wish the whole world could hear me speak! All that I thought I loved in you existed but in him. (*Pointing to Jack*) He was your heart, your enthusiasm, your only good! I see that now. And he once gone, you were like one dead. You were a body, Noel Blake, without a soul!

JACK. What does this mean?

MADGE. (*Carried away by her feelings.*) It means that I have learnt the truth at last. Ah Jack! how could you speak to me as you did just now? Am I such a stock, such a stone, such a senseless thing as I must seem to you? You to supplicate to me, when my place should be in the very dust beneath your feet, Jack—I love you!

JACK. (*Wild'y, as he catches her in his arms.*) You love me, Madge?

MADGE. I love you! with the first love, warm, and true, and lasting, of the heart you have cherished for so long. The early foolish blossoms, dear, were offered to another, it is true, but they are withered now, and trampled under foot. The perfect bloom and sweetness of the ripened fruit is here for you—if you will take it, Jack?

JACK. My wife! my wife! (*They embrace.*)

NOEL. (*Sneering*) A very pretty scene, truly! I had no idea I should be expected to assist at your Idyls, like a poodle in the lady's lap. But I am rightly served. (*To Madge.*) You seem to forget that it was I who took you in when you were left an orphan, and gave you the shelter of my roof!

MADGE. No, no, it was not you. I do not wish to be ungrateful but so many things are clear now that I did not understand at one time. It was not you, but Jack, faithful, who worked for me as he worked for you. Kind, faithful hands, how much do I not owe to them! (*Kisses them.*)

NOEL. (*With a sneering laugh*) I see I am in the way, and I will intrude upon your raptures no longer. In coming here I merely wished to prove that my suspicions were correct, before returning to the happiness that awaits me. I may as well mention, perhaps, that I have been accepted by Miss Blanchmayne; therefore our paths in life will naturally lie very wide apart henceforth.

JACK. They have sold that poor girl to you, then; and you came here with a *le* on your lips to— Well, be kind to her at least! To do her justice, she is a reluctant victim to the barter.

(*Enter Major, hastily, without knocking. Madge shrinks away from Jack, who draws her to his side again, and holds her in his arms.*)

MADGE. That horrible man!

MAJOR. As I feared! My dear Noel, what on earth are you doing here?

NOEL. (*Impatiently.*) What are you doing here, for that matter?

JACK. (*Calmly*) The very question I was about to ask.

MAJOR. (*To Noel.*) I am the bearer of bad news, for which you have no one but yourself to blame. With the game in your own hands, you choose to throw up your cards at the most critical moment, and—

NOEL. What do you mean?

MAJOR. I mean that Miss Blanchmayne has bolted.

NOEL. Bolted?

MAJOR. Yes, with Ffolliott. They are half way to Paris by this time!

NOEL. Damnation! Why didn't you prevent them? What was her mother about? I shall be the laughing-stock of the whole neighborhood!

MAJOR. Devilish unlucky, to be sure. But you knew the girl was tricky, and you ought to have stayed at home and kept your eye upon her.

NOEL. (*Forcing a laugh.*) Well, Miss Blanchmayne will be likely to repent her choice before I shall. It seems I am doomed to be unlucky in love, but I have still several thousand substantial consolations left.

MAJOR. To be sure! There is as good fish in the sea, you know, and a man of your wealth need not go begging long for a wife. Now, if you are quite ready, I have made all the arrangements for our journey to Vienna. Why shouldn't we start to-night?

NOEL. I am willing. But before I go I have one word to say. You have received me with coldness (*to Madge*) and insult, but I have only one answer to make: I am your only surviving relative, and it is my duty to provide for you, and enable you to lead a life of respectability.

MADGE. Noel!

NOEL. (*Taking out pocket-book.*) By these papers you will find that I have settled on you the sum of—

(*Jack quietly touching Noel's outstretched arm in imitation of his action in Act I, the pocket-book falls on the ground.*)

JACK. Major Whyte, I am afraid the penalty you have to pay in your character of mentor to Mr. Blake is somewhat heavy. There is a trifle for your pains. (*Kicking pocket-book carelessly towards him. Noel starts back, pale with rage. Jack addresses him on his own words of Act I.*) "Was there ever anything to equal the insolence of these rich people?"

(*Major picks up book and pockets it.*)

NOEL. You will be glad to apply one of these days for help, and you may not find me so foolishly liberal as I have been to-day.

MADGE. Poor Noel!

(*Enter Mr. Smylie, in the greatest excitement.*)

SMYLIE. Mr. Beamish? (*Sees Jack.*) Oh, you are here, sir, you are here! I rejoice that I have found you. I have but come from Field Royal, where no one

ould give me any information as to your whereabouts. But I remembered this address—I remembered it, sir.

JACK. You have business with me?

SMYLIE. Of the most important nature—most important, I assure you. Ah, you are here, Mr. Blake, as well! Nothing could be more fortunate—nothing!

NOEL. If you have anything to consult me about, you can write to me at Vienna. I leave England to-night.

SMYLIE. No time like the present, sir; and I am afraid my news will not keep—will not keep, believe me.

NOEL. Make haste, then; I have no time to lose.

SMYLIE. Briefly, then, I will explain that, having, with your permission, gone carefully through the mass of papers found in the private cabinet of the late Sir Richard Gaunt, it is my duty to report a very remarkable discovery.

NOEL. A discovery?

SMYLIE. No less important than that of a second will, dated some days after that by which you inherited.

MAJOR. The devil!

JACK. But what has all that to do with me?

SMYLIE. A great deal, Mr. Beamish, a great deal. Your father's name, I believe, was Robert Beamish?

JACK. (*Nodding.*) Yes.

SMYLIE. And he was an artist?

JACK. Yes.

SMYLIE. Who resided chiefly on the Continent, where you were born?

JACK. Yes, in Antwerp, so I have heard my mother say; but—

SMYLIE. There was a little mystery attached to your mother's maiden name and early life?

JACK. She was a lady, sir, highly born and beautiful, and she sacrificed position, wealth, all to an ungovernable passion for my poor father, who had been engaged as drawing master in her family. More than this she would never tell me, and I was still so young when my parents died.

SMYLIE. Exactly, sir, exactly. Then it is left to me to inform you that your mother was the only and beloved daughter of the late Sir Richard Gaunt!

JACK and MADGE. Great Heavens!

NOEL. It is a lie! you—

SMYLIE. No, no; not at all, Mr. Blake; not at all. Lawyers can speak the truth at times, and you will find that I am perfectly correct in my statement. To proceed, some resemblance which he saw in you to your mother, Mr. Beamish, with the presence in your room of yonder miniature (*pointing towards mini.-piece.* *Mrs. Bunn, who has been listening, turns and looks at miniature with an exclamation of recognition,* caused Sir Richard to institute inquiries, after his visit to your studio some months ago, with what result I have just informed you. His illness alone prevented his openly seeking a reconciliation with his daughter's child; or, perhaps (*with a suspicious look at Major,*) he was surrounded by interested advisers; but the fact remains that he has atoned after his death for the life-long anger he has nourished—and—and allow me to congratulate you. I could not wish to see the old manse and the old property in better hands!

NOEL. (*Furiously.*) What do you mean?

SMYLIE. That the second will holds good, and Mr. Beamish is the heir to Field Royal!

(*Exclamation from all but Noel.*)

MAJOR. (*Touching pocket-book under his breast pocket.*) The game is up. Nothing so indicative as to intrude in a bereaved friend's natural emotion. I think this will about pay my expenses to Vienna. (*Exit.*)

MRS. B. (*Indicating Miniature.*) That's poor Miss Sybil, sure enough and to think that her boy is to have the old place after all (*wiping her eyes*), and my poor master not to live to know it.

MADGE. (*To Bunn.*) You remember Jack's mother?

JACK. There was a time when such news would have turned my head, but to-day I am too happy. I have won a treasure that I value more than wealth or birth—my wife!

NOEL. (*snerting*) So you have got it all at last! You can afford to indulge in high-flown sentiments. But thy don't impose on me! I shall dispute this cursed will to the death—I give you warning! In the meantime make the most of what you have robbed me of. Money, Rank and Love! Egad! there's only one thing wanted to complete the Arcadian felicity of the scene—but that I fear, you cannot hope to

enjoy, your much lamented dog. What a pity he is not in a position to express his congratulations!

MADGE, (*indignantly.*) For shame, sir—

(*Music.*)

SMYTHE. (*heard outside.*) Where is he! Let me see him! Jack—Jack, I say!

(*Smythe rushes in with dog, which has a bandage over one leg and its forepaw bound up.*)

Here he is, here's Van—not dead, alive and kicking. Egad! he wanted to bite the Major on the stairs, just as we came up, and I'm sorry he did not succeed!

JACK and MADGE. Van, dear old Van. Oh, Smythe you good kind fellow. How did you find him! Is he badly hurt? Poor old dog! Poor old boy!

SMYTHE. Bless you! a little care will soon set him to rights. I picked him up in the shrubbery as I was leaving the place, and I had his wounds seen to in the village, or I should have been here sooner!

(*Madge takes dog to sofa, and covers him with her shawl. Mrs. B. comes forward to express her concern. Jack and Smythe shake hands.*)

NOEL. I really feel unworthy the society of such model characters—Van included. Major! (*looking around*) Oh! he is gone!

SMYTHE. Yes, and if you have any desire to recover your pocket-book, I advise you to lose no time in following him to Vienna!

NOEL, (*furiously*) Keep your advice for those who can afford to pay for it!

(*Casts a withering glance at the group by the sofa and exits with a bitter laugh.*)

SMYTHE.—Poor devil! That's the last you will ever see of him!

JACK, (*drawing a long breath.*) So let him go out of our sight—out of our lives forever. Ah, my wife! We are not the first who have taken for sterling gold, what has proved, when tested, to be only base metal! (*They go up and stand before picture.*)

SMYTHE. A shoe go after them, say I, here comes the boys! (*Music.*) (*To Smythe.*) You'll stay to supper of course?

(*Enter Teddy and Horngold. Jack and Madge come down, greeting them warmly. Horngold pulls bottles of champagne from his pockets, which he puts on table. Bohemians crowd around the lovers, pledging them. All sit at the table as the curtain falls. Mrs. B. is pouring out tea.*)

CURTAIN.



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The original of the same name is in the possession of the same person.

(1841)

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